The School Of Life

This book was birthed as a result of my own spiritual growth and lessons learned that I attribute to my daily devotionals, life experiences and revelation from the precious Holy Spirit. Make no mistake about it, developing the habit of having daily devotionals is extremely important to your spiritual development. I compiled these learnings so that I might share with others that may be going through their own issues and developments as they go through "The School Of Life". May you be blessed and encouraged as you read this little book. I pray in Jesus' name that you will learn, benefit, share and apply these principles.

My studies continue.

(A child of GOD, servant of Jesus Christ and Minister of the Gospel)

GOD has always taken care of the people who have trusted him !

As I begin this book, I reflect back to a time when I was in the darkest, loneliest deep pit I had ever experienced in my life. I was the cause of most of my problems. I humbled myself and asked for the help that only HE can give, only to see GOD Almighty reach down and bring me out of that pit over a period of time, into a life that is exceptionally peaceful and full of contentment and genuine joy. He rescued me from my failures and sins that had brought me into this situation. He is faithful and true.

Though extremely painful at times, the experience was one that will last me for a lifetime. This is a truthful testimony that I wish to share with you regarding the faithfulness and goodness of our LORD. Please believe me, "He is to be trusted". You may need to hear this at this very moment because of things that you are

going through. Let this be an encouragement to you whatever your situation may be.

By the way, I have experienced His rescues many times in my life. I have not always been faithful, HE HAS!

I assure you that this is TRUTH.

The various subjects and discussions in this book are in no particular order. They were written rather randomly as I studied and wrote. I don't think that takes away from the overall value of the book. It just happens to be the way that I felt led to write . Additionally, there are many prayers included that were written along the way. I thought that they would be beneficial. I simply wrote as things came to me while I studied the Word, researched the Scriptures and prayed.

Let us begin:

His blood was shed once for all time to cover the darkness in our lives. And he himself acted as the scapegoat for us. Jesus died for us so that His blood would cover our sin. In the Old Testament days animal sacrifices were made to God to atone the sins of men. The New Testament covenant changed all of that so that the blood of Jesus Christ became our atonement for sin.

The Holy Bible says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day". 2 Timothy 1:12

Like David, we must trust GOD to make things right. This enables us to understand his nature and trust him more fully. He teaches us to depend upon him through meditating on His Word

and listening to his voice in our heart. He hears us when we pray and He knows all about our circumstances.

There is a thing called Faith in future grace and it is real. It is the sovereign grace of GOD.

Abraham trusted GOD to do the impossible. And did you know that God was faithful and fulfilled that trust. You can believe and trust God to do what He promises.

You who hope and believe in Jesus Christ and follow him in the obedience of faith are the descendants of Abraham and heirs of his covenant promises. Galatians 3:29.

If we will be honest with ourselves, we can reflect on our life and see the many times that our Lord has rescued us and other people that we know. Remember also that emotions cannot always be trusted. Fact is the trains engine, faith follows fact and feelings are the caboose. We can trust Him. He is faithful.

The GOD who cares for the birds of the air values us and can be trusted to provide for all our needs. Matthew 6:26-27.

No matter how far someone may have wandered away from GOD, they are never fully out of his reach. 2 Peter 3:9.

GOD is alive and will always be. When He spoke in the Bible through men He said what He meant and He meant what He said.

Dear LORD, please fill me with a spirit of worship—all week long, every day, all year long. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

In regards to entering Heaven (GOD'S kingdom) The Holy Word Of GOD says that we must enter through the narrow gate, for

wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Matthew 7:13.

Remember that we are weak but He is strong. We should always focus on His might and not ours. If we rely solely on our own strength to get by in life, we are doomed to failure. The Bible instructs us to rely of GOD's unlimited strength and power.

Dear LORD GOD, we need Your wise discernment in every area and moment of our lives. Please guide and direct our paths. In Jesus' name, Amen. And thank you for never giving up on me. And likewise, you have not given up on those I love who are still wandering and lost. Please touch their hearts and call them to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Understand this, that GOD is infinite in power and wisdom and creativity and love and will see to it that we get more and more lovely and refined forever; and he is so very creative to think of new things to do together so that there will be no boredom for the future of millions of millenniums.

Father, when my life feels barren or buffeted by stiff winds, please plant me deeper in Your steadying love. That is where I will find peace, comfort and strength. Thank you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

May I offer you some extremely valuable advice? Put your hope in GOD and HIM alone. He will never fail you. Rest assured.

Be still and know that I am GOD. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance that the LORD will bring you today. Exodus 14:13.

David said, "The sacrifice acceptable to GOD is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O GOD, you will not despise." Psalm 51:17. As you can see, The initial thing that makes a prayer acceptable to GOD is our brokenness and humility.

Knowing GOD is an immeasurable pursuit. Understand that as we come to know in our hearts that we can trust GOD, we can rest assured that He will prosper us. This is a lifelong experience that will be well worth your attention. Do not neglect pursuing and knowing God.

He went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin, the LORD is with you when you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you." 2 Chronicles 15:2.

What is your calling as you go forth in your walk with Christ? It is only through GOD's grace that we can be faithful to our calling. Be careful and truthful in your walk with GOD. Pray that He will keep you faithful to the purposes He has for your life. He strengthens those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. Matthew 13:45-46.

Dear Lord, I am thankful that You are my eternal Father. I need a good father, a genuine father, that will not leave me or forsake me. I'm grateful that You are this Father for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

As we hear the promises of GOD and trust him with courage, knowing that there is great reproach brought upon GOD by our unbelief, then he is greatly honored and He takes pleasure in that.

GOD does not desire to harm us because He truly loves us. He offers love that will never hurt us. So accordingly to live in His love is to have freedom. Choose to live in His love moment by moment.

It is not unusual for us to feel alone, forgotten, and trapped in the grip of the many spiritual predators in this world. May GOD help us remember that He compassionately cares, comforts, and fights for us. He will never leave you nor forsake you.

How does prayer work? This is the way that it works. We pray. And then after praying, the Holy Spirit enables and directs us!

LORD, help me to listen to Your Holy Spirit's direction for my life and know that He will direct my steps. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Oh Holy GOD, please preserve my life; in your righteousness, please bring me out of trouble whenever I find myself in a mess. I acknowledge that You are the provider of every one of my needs. I also acknowledgeable that You are a FAITHFUL provider.

Matthew Henry wrote: "Forgetting former experiences leaves us under present doubts. We are quick to forget all that GOD has done for us in the past and grow impatient when He does not act in the manner that we desire in the present. We then sometimes doubt His love for us even though He has shown Himself good and true in our past". If you are having trouble trusting the LORD this day, remember a time in the past when He provided for you. This will develop and strengthen your trust Muscle.

Jesus entrusted himself to his Father 1 Peter 2:23 and counted on His faith and hope to bring about the resurrection and all the joys of reunion with his Father and the redemption of his people.

Now, what about our finances? Did you know that when you trust GOD with your finances, He will throw open the doors of heaven's storehouses and pour out blessings on you. And just when we think it's enough, or even too much, he will continue the blessings. Pressed down, shaken down, never-ending . . you will drown in the love of GOD. (a word from this author) I have

experienced this (personally) and continue to do so. THIS IS TRUTH, YOU MAY BELIEVE IT WITH CONFIDENCE. It is a miraculous and real concept. I testify to this truth and will stand by it.

Read over and absorb the following items from the Bible in regards to Paul the Apostles life ! You may want to apply these to your own life.

He asked for strength that he might achieve.

He was made weak that he might endure.

He asked for health to do larger things.

He was given infirmity that he might do better things.

He asked for power that he might impress men.

He was given weakness that he might seek GOD.

He asked for wealth so that he might be free from care.

He was given poverty that he might be wiser than carefree.

He asked for all the things that he might enjoy in life.

He was given life that he might enjoy all things.

He received nothing he asked for.

He received more than he ever hoped for.

His prayer was answered.

What a wise and blessed man.

Have you ever heard the old saying that the shortest distance between a closed and open door is the distance between your knees and the floor. The one who kneels to the LORD can stand up to anything.

Today I will accept that my blocked door doesn't mean GOD doesn't love me. Quite the opposite. I'll see it as proof that He does. Thank You LORD that You know best and have even better plans for me and my service for You. Help me wait patiently for You to open the right door at the right time!

For I, The LORD, do not change. Malachi 3:6. You may rest assured that He does not change.

Heavenly Father, please remind us that though we have so many blessings, our only real wealth is in You. So therefore I acknowledge my helplessness and inadequacy and place my complete trust in You. Please help me to express true humility in practical ways today and show that my trust is in You alone. In Jesus' name, Amen.

He is the one who restores us when we stumble and sin thereby finding ourselves far from His presence. If a person sins, the best thing to do is immediately confess it to GOD, ask for His forgiveness and mercy, thank Him sincerely and move on and do better in the future. Don't forget to learn from the experience.

Christ, the incarnate GOD Himself, is the holy, loving bishop of our souls. He is intensely concerned for His own and looks after us to preserve our souls and empower us to fulfill His purposes for us. Just as our Father in heaven knows every hair on our head Matthew 10:30, so too does the Son have His eye on us every second. Indeed, He is concerned with even the smallest details of our lives.

Dr. R.C. Sproul said that you can summarize the Bible thusly: "GOD, who by His mighty power and wisdom sustains the universe in all its complexities, nevertheless has His eye on each and every one of His people, so intent is He on their welfare. Even when human shepherds and elders fail us, Christ is leading us through the valley, keeping us safe that we might see Him one day in glory. Psalm:23. Let us be comforted by this fact no matter what is happening in our lives".

Dear GOD Almighty, I acknowledgeable that You are with us. You are our fortress. You are The GOD of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and You are our God. We declare and believe this. You have said, "be still and know that I am GOD". In this world there's

plenty to be afraid of, but our GOD offers us His presence, for He Himself is our safety. So, LORD, today I ask for Your divine protection and thank You for Your unfailing love. Thank You that I can claim this, and it can change my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

My GOD will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19.

Father, today I am so grateful for Your presence in my life and I yearn for more of You. And LORD I long for total righteousness so that the world will see more of Your faithfulness in me. But I always need the help and guidance of Your Holy Spirit. Please fill me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

When we read Ecclesiastes it takes us in search of a SAVIOR, a search for GOD. How can we be saved from this worldly mess? Who can save us from endless, meaningless efforts? Who can fulfill our longings? Then our good GOD answers and says, "I will". That is the goodness of our Holy God.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may find grace for a well-timed help. Hebrews 4:16.

My times are in His hand. Psalm 31:15.

In regards to our final death or eternal separation from God, it is an impossibility for those who put their faith in him to experience that eternal separation. So, physical death actually becomes the doorway to a greater life with GOD.

My precious Lord is my strength and my portion forever. Praise Him. All glory and power forever to Him. I love Him and will follow Him all the days of my life.

I read that it is better to gouge out my eye than to lust. Matthew 5:29. And that if I think about things that are pure and lovely and excellent, the peace of GOD will be with me. Philippians 4:8.

I also read that setting the mind on the flesh brings death, but setting the mind on the Spirit brings life and peace. Romans 8:6.

I read that lust wages war against my soul 1 Peter 2:11 and that the pleasures of this life choke out the life of the Spirit. Luke 8:14.

But best of all, I read that GOD withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly Psalm 84:11, and that the pure in heart will see GOD. Matthew 5:8. So now as I pray for my faith to be satisfied with GOD's life and peace, the sword of the Spirit carves the sugar coating off the poison of lust. I see it for what it is. And by the grace of GOD, its alluring power is broken.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life; they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand." John 10:27–28.

Here is the Biblical definition of "Faith", it is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. Thank you Oh GOD Almighty. Please teach me more about faith and help me to develop my faith. I look to Your Holy Spirit for guidance.

Remember that our heavenly Father always keeps his promises. This is truth that you may rely on. GOD cannot lie. GOD is truth and love. He is the very definition of love.

The central picture in Revelation 5 is the moving image of a slain yet living Lamb worshiped by all creation. GOD's people had long looked for the prophesied Messiah, the Lion of Judah; Isaiah

11:1-9 to powerfully deliver them. Most assumed this Messiah, much like a lion, would conquer through force and vengeful violence. Instead, the Messiah, the Lion of Judah, was revealed to be a gentle Lamb, willing to give everything, even His own life, for the salvation of others. It's only that Lamb who is found worthy to establish GOD's justice and bring history to its long-awaited goal.

We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:18.

Let us go through the door of total surrender because the Holy Bible says that "He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold". Job 23:10.

Sometimes we may find ourselves on an unfamiliar path. Don't be afraid of the path that GOD may lead you on. Embrace it. You see, GOD may take you down a path in your life to ensure the reward of your inheritance. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 2 Corinthians 4:17.

AFRAID OF DEATH NO MORE

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Hebrews 2:14–15.

How does Christ deliver us from the fear of death and set us free to live with the kind of loving abandon that can "let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also"?

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood…

The term "children" is taken from the previous verse and refers to the spiritual offspring of Christ, the Messiah. These are also the "children of GOD." In other words, in sending Christ GOD has the salvation of his "children" especially in view.

By His dying and resurrection Christ took away the devils fangs. How? By covering all our sin Hebrews 10:12. This means that Satan has no legitimate grounds to accuse us before GOD. Who shall bring any charge against GOD's elect? It is GOD who justifies. Romans 8:33. On what grounds does he justify? Through the blood of Jesus. Hebrews 9:14; Romans 5:9.

You need to recognize that satan's ultimate weapon against us is our own sin. If the death of Jesus takes it away, the chief weapon the devil has is taken out of his hand. In that sense he is rendered powerless.

He delivers all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. So, we are free from the fear of death. GOD has justified us. There is only future grace in front of us. Satan cannot overturn that decree. And GOD means for our ultimate safety to have an immediate effect on our lives. He means for the happy ending to take away slavery and fear of the present.

King David said, "One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple." Psalm 27:4

Dear GOD, I believe. I believe Jesus was both GOD and man, and that he lived a perfectly sinless life, offering himself for me on the cross. I believe in the resurrection. I choose today to step into the light because I know I need you. Amen.

"And I am sure of this, He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:6.

He will keep you to the end, guiltless in the day of our LORD Jesus Christ. GOD is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our LORD.

Trust in the promises of our GOD who cannot lie. Those who are born again are as secure as GOD is faithful.

Please invigorate me today LORD, with that sense of sovereign obligation. Then lead me to someone with whom I can share Your grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Try praying this prayer, "I can do nothing apart from You". It is simple and powerful. What situations are you facing today that need prayer? How can you rest assured that GOD is with you and loves you? If you will search The Holy Bible you will find the answers. But like all good things it requires effort on our part. Put forth that effort. You will be glad that you did.

10 THINGS "YAHWEH" MEANS

GOD also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, The LORD, the GOD of your fathers, the GOD of Abraham, the GOD of Isaac, and the GOD of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." Exodus 3:15.

GOD's name is almost always translated LORD (all caps) in the English Bible. But the Hebrew would be pronounced something like "Yahweh," and is built on the word for "I am."

So, every time we hear the word Yahweh, or every time you see LORD in the English Bible, you should think this is a proper name (like Peter or John) built out of the word for "I am" and reminding us each time that GOD absolutely is.

There are at least 10 things the name Yahweh, "I AM," says about GOD:

1. He never had a beginning. Every child asks, "Who made GOD?" And every wise parent says, "Nobody made GOD. GOD simply is and always was. No beginning."

2. GOD will never end. If he did not come in to being he cannot go out of being, because he is being.

3. GOD is absolute reality. There is no reality before him. There is no reality outside of him unless he wills it and makes it. He is all that was eternally. No space, no universe, no emptiness. Only GOD.

4. GOD is utterly independent. He depends on nothing to bring him into being or support him or counsel him or make him what he is.

5. Everything that is not GOD depends totally on GOD. The entire universe is utterly secondary. It came into being by GOD and stays in being moment by moment on GOD's decision to keep it in being.

6. All the universe is by comparison to GOD as nothing. Contingent, dependent reality is to absolute independent reality as a shadow to substance. As an echo to a thunderclap. All that we are amazed by in the world and in the galaxies, is, compared to GOD as nothing.

7. GOD is constant. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He cannot be improved. He is not becoming anything. He is who he is.

8. GOD is the absolute standard of truth and goodness and beauty. There is no law-book to which he looks to know what is right. No almanac to establish facts. No guild to determine what is excellent or beautiful. He himself is the standard of what is right, what is true, what is beautiful.

9. GOD does whatever he pleases, and it is always right and always beautiful and always in accord with truth. All reality that is outside of him he created and designed and governs as the absolute reality. So, he is utterly free from any constraints that don't originate from the counsel of his own will.

10. GOD is the most important and most valuable reality and person in the universe. He is more worthy of interest and attention and admiration and enjoyment than all other realities, including the entire universe.

We humans have an innate desire How to try to control our lives? But, after careful study of The Word Of GOD we discover that a much better way is to turn our control over to GOD because then we realize that His ways are superior by far. Ask yourself this question How does trusting in GOD's control bring peace?

When we read the Psalms and study about David's life we find that he learned an important lesson about always staying vertical in his relationship with GOD. He matured in GOD and eventually understood the value of that vertical relationship with GOD. What a valuable thing to learn. It is of lifelong value.

Prayer is the form of faith that connects us today with the grace that will make us adequate for tomorrow's ministry. Timing is everything. So, I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I have set my heart on your laws. Psalm 119:30.

How important is our speech and what we say to others? I pray that GOD will help me keep a close watch on my conversation and be sure to season it with the salt of purity. LORD, forgive me when I grieve Your Holy Spirit by what I do and what I say and how I say it. I need Your Holy Spirit to guide and direct my speech. May my speech honor and glorify You and the gospel.

GOD understands our disobedient heart. He sees what we really are; yet He gives second chances. GOD gave Jonah a second chance. He gave the people of Nineveh a second chance. It is a lesson of love from a heavenly Father who specializes in second chances. Have you blown it? Have you disappointed someone close to you? GOD is the GOD of second chances. All we must do is acknowledge our waywardness. He will restore. He will give grace. Take time to ask Him to help and guide you.

Dear GOD, thank you for meeting our needs today. Thank you for giving us wealth that will last forever. Please help us to not envy the prosperity of wicked people, and please forgive us for when we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5.

The way to thwart the devil is to strengthen the very thing he is trying most to destroy — your faith.

Just as in Isaiah's day, we can rest in GOD's transcendence and his sovereignty. GOD is in control over the kingdoms of the world. And his plans, not theirs, will be victorius.

"I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life." Psalm 119:93.

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:14-16.

There will come a day—a great day—when GOD will banish everything that has darkened life. Sin. Evil. Demonic forces. Death. Sickness. Pain. Shame. He hates these things and will triumph over them. LORD, let this start with me. Give me a closer walk with You today. Then enable me to encourage others as well, individually, so that all to whom I minister might be in harmony as we individually are close to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Jesus, while we struggle through a world full of trouble, I need Your presence. I need Your uplifting love to take me out of the shadows and help me stand in the light of Your magnificence. Thank you for always being there for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of GOD— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of GOD. John 1:12-13.

LORD, my soul, my heart, my flesh, cry out to You for the filling and power of Your Holy Spirit. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22.

Living by faith in GOD's grace means being satisfied with all that GOD is for us in Jesus. Therefore, faith will not shrink back from what reveals and magnifies all that GOD is for us in Jesus. That is what our own weakness and suffering does.

Conflict is something that most people, when given the opportunity, try to avoid. Peace is so desirable that significant differences between individuals and groups are often ignored, and unity is sought under the lowest common denominator. When peace is sought under these auspices, it can be easy to ignore the importance of truth altogether. The modern heirs of nineteenth-century Christian liberalism reveal such tendencies. In the drive to live peaceably with other professing believers and even other non-Christian religions, liberalism has tended to redefine Christianity as "the universal fatherhood of GOD and the universal brotherhood of man," or some other innocuous definition. Ironically, liberals tend to tolerate any kind of belief system unless it happens to represent orthodox, Biblical faith.

Christians have often divided over matters not essential to Christian orthodoxy and lobbed charges of heresy at one another. Such actions have created a distaste for theology in the minds of many people, and there is now a tendency to downplay any essential differences within the visible church because of all the vitriol shown over the less important points of doctrine. Let us be passionate for the truth but let us not divide unless Christian orthodoxy is at stake.

Dear GOD, I seek Your wisdom. Please give me a humble heart, ready to receive life-giving correction.

The words of a certain Old Testament king (Hezekiah) and his commander echo those of our enemy (the enemy of our souls).

When we're staring down obstacles too big for us, the enemy slyly suggests that it's futile to trust GOD.

The enemy wants us to focus on the "what ifs" and endless possible outcomes. He wants us to panic, to live as if we're orphaned—because getting us to step outside of our identity as GOD's children spells victory for darkness. But GOD wants us to stand securely in his strength. We're his responsibility, and he has promised to take care of us.

Hezekiah turned to GOD, and the good King answered. The enemy was proved a fool. When we trust in GOD, our enemy is always proved a fool.

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the LORD Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Acts 4:32-33.

The nearer our souls draw to GOD the larger our love will grow, and the greater our love the more unselfish we shall become and the greater our care for the souls of others. Hence increased spiritual experience, so far as it is genuine, brings with it a strong desire that others may know the same grace that we ourselves enjoy. This leads quite naturally to an increased effort to lead others to a closer and more satisfying fellowship with GOD.

The "holy catholic church" and the "Roman Catholic Church" are not identical. The term catholic simply means "universal," and in the creeds of the church it refers to the reality that the one church of Jesus Christ is not limited to any geographical region (like for example "Rome") i.e., the Roman Catholic Church, ethnicity, economic class, age group, historical era, or sex. When we say that we believe in the "catholic church," we are simply affirming that the church is made up of people from all kinds of backgrounds. The Roman Catholic Church did not see things that way. This is the difference in the two terms Roman

Catholic Church and Catholic Church. Anyone who turns from sin and trusts Jesus alone for salvation is a part of the church universal. Galatians. 3:28.

Today I will stay in tune with GOD's Spirit so that I will know what responses He wants me to make. Help me LORD to be aware of Your purposes in the events and challenges of my life.

Father, I can do nothing apart from You.

Forgive me, LORD. I fear that all too often I have let You down when You were depending on me. Use me today as a faithful servant, Amen.

Now, are you prepared for some amazing past prophecies and their fulfillment?

We will address 2 key parts of Isaiah's prophecies. Namely, "the suffering Servant and His associated names".

The LORD speaks to Zion, to Jerusalem: "Prepare yourselves. Dress in your finest, shake off your chains—I am setting you free." After GOD frees his people from Babylon, GOD himself is returning to Jerusalem. He is bringing salvation with him.

In response to one of the vilest actions ever perpetrated, GOD poured out more goodness . He used our hatred to heal us. By his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:5. The wounds he allowed us to inflict on Himself would provide our very salvation. Only a GOD of infinite goodness could do such a thing. Only a good, good King.

(Now for the especially amazing part)

Then GOD turns his focus once again to his Servant. The servant will live a blameless life, but humanity will reject him. GOD will

choose to put the sins of everyone on him, punishing him in order to bring peace to all who would believe.

Read on for more information about the two very powerful prophecies from Isaiah.

The first I would like to direct you to is regarding the suffering and Glory of the "Servant" :

Isaiah: 52.13-through Isaiah: 53.12

it is the strongest and obviously accurate prophetic message in The Holy Bible predicting the birth, life, death and resurrection of our precious SAVIOR many years prior to His birth. And then it was fulfilled many years later (This is Prophecy at its very best and most accurate). How can anyone read this and be aware of its prediction and then look at the life of Jesus' and then still not believe? Don't miss this ! (It is of key importance). Don't just passively read this. Read it, digest it and seriously think about it. Research it !

It reads as follows:

13 See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted and highly exalted.

14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him, his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness.
15 So he will sprinkle many nations and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.
1 Who has believed our message? and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering,

and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by GOD, stricken by him, and afflicted.
5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.
6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth, he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.
8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people, he was punished.
9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.
10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
11 After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.
12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors. Isaiah 52:13-53:12

The second that I would like to refer you to is regarding His identity (who He is).

It reads as follows:

Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty GOD, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

These were the prophecies ! The entire" New Testament is the fulfillment of those prophecies.

Here are more beautiful comparisons of Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment:
When Jesus first publicly proclaimed his mission, he quoted Isaiah 61: 1-3 and declared that he is its fulfillment. Luke 4:18-19, 21.

Old Testament

Isaiah 61: 1-3

1 "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,
2 To proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our GOD, to comfort all who mourn,
3 And provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor."

New Testament
Luke 4: 18-19 and 21
18 "The Spirit of the LORD is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.
19 To proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.
21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Dear Jesus, thank you for your ultimate sacrifice. Please help me to daily respond with a sacrifice of praise. Amen

Let's move on now to another interesting subject. It has been said that there are more stars in the universe than there are words and sounds that all humans of all time have ever spoken. Why? The Bible is crystal clear about this: The heavens declare the glory of GOD: the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Psalm 19:1.

If someone asks, "If earth is the only inhabited planet and man the only rational inhabitant among the stars, why such a large and empty universe?" The answer is: It's not about us. It's about GOD. And that's an understatement. GOD created us to know him and love him and show him. And then he gave us a hint of what he is like — the universe.

Thank You, Father, for Your grace that continues to call so patiently. LORD, you're calling some today with whom I could have the privilege of sharing the Gospel. Give me a sensitivity today to opportunities where I might be Your human voice.

We should try our best to get along with fellow believers especially regarding arguments about relatively "silly" issues that don't really affect the "MAIN" tenants of our faith. Of course, issues that could assail the primary foundations of Christianity must be addressed and dealt with.

This subject is addressed in 1 Corinthians 1:10, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our LORD Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

HOW CAN I HAVE GOD'S PEACE?

Finding true genuine peace in our Life:

The key element in true, lasting peace is the presence of GOD. Isaiah says to GOD, "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you." Isaiah 26:3. Christ is our peace—his presence is the presence of peace

within us. Ephesians 2:14. And so, Jesus declares, in me you may have peace. John 16:33. What is this peace? It is an inner sense of contentment and quietness, regardless of life's circumstances. It is steadfast confidence in our ever-faithful, unchanging heavenly Father. It is the presence of joy during unhappiness. True peace does not merely dull our pain. A person who has genuine, GODly peace can endure an avalanche of hardship and difficulty and still enjoy an inner peace that surpasses all human understanding. Why? Because it does not come from pleasant circumstances, nice events or good things others may do for us. Instead, it is because the Spirit of our holy, omnipotent and never-changing GOD lives within us. Does enjoying GOD's perfect peace mean that you'll never feel the effects of the storms raging around you? Hardly. But His peace is complete, adequate and sufficient for anything you face. Keep in mind three keys to experiencing sustained peace:

1. Focus on GOD. Perfect peace comes when you fix your mind on GOD. You must discipline yourself to meditate on GOD's presence and work. When you spend time concentrating on a problem, does it not seem to grow bigger? In the same way, you will have a greater sense of GOD's presence and provision as you fix your mind on him.

2. Trust him. You never have to worry about GOD acting too late or providing insufficient help. His timing and purposes are perfect; in fact, he uses your tribulations to reveal more of himself to you. His Word is full of rock-solid promises, many of which involve granting you peace. Know that he will always honor them!

3. Meditate on his Word. Psalm 119: 165 emphasizes that those who love GOD's Word have great peace. Your most precious material possession is your Bible. Every believer should love GOD's Word and feast on it daily. If you love it, you're going to believe what it says—and then it will guide and anchor your life. *These words of wisdom are from Pastor Charles F. Stanley.

Lift up your eyes on high and see (referring to the starry universe): who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might,

and because he is strong in power not one is missing. Isaiah 40: 26.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16.

The average person in the world today, without faith and without GOD and without hope, is engaged in a desperate personal search throughout his lifetime. He does not really know where he has been. He does not really know what he is doing here and now. He does not know where he is going.

The sad commentary is that he is doing it all on borrowed time and borrowed money and borrowed strength—and he already knows that in the end he will surely die! It boils down to the bewildered confession of many that "we have lost GOD somewhere along the way."

Man, made more like GOD than any other creature, has become less like GOD than any other creature. Created to reflect the glory of GOD, he has retreated sullenly into his cave—reflecting only his own sinfulness.

Certainly, it is a tragedy above all tragedies in this world that man, made with a soul to worship and praise and sing to GOD's glory, now sulks silently in his cave. Love has gone from his heart. Light has gone from his mind. Having lost GOD, he blindly stumbles on through this dark world to find only a grave at the end.

There has been much discussion and debate over the many years regarding identification of the true church. Let us examine what constitutes a TRUE church.

The Marks of the Church

1 Corinthians 11: 17-34 says "In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me".

There are many different bodies that call themselves churches, whether or not they are true manifestations of the church of Jesus Christ. How then can we tell when a church in name is also a church in reality?

Faced with this same problem, the Reformers and Roman Catholics answered this question very differently. Rome has said that the bishop is the mark of the church, that is, the true church is present when you have a duly consecrated bishop who is part of a line of succession going back to the apostles. Ultimately, a bishop is a true bishop only if he submits to the pope; thus, in Roman Catholicism only Roman Catholic parishes constitute the true church.

Protestants recognize the biblical failings of this view and, in studying Scripture, traditionally define a true church according to two criteria:

1. The Word—There is no true church without the right proclamation of the Word of GOD. In other words, a group that denies any of the essential truths of the Christian faith is not a church. The essential truths of Christianity are clearly taught in Scripture, and the Nicene Creed is one document that helpfully summarizes them. A truth like justification by faith alone is included in this list even though it is not specifically mentioned in the creed, because Paul lists it as a defining mark of the Gospel and it is a necessary deduction from the creed's emphasis on salvation through Christ alone.

Galatians 1:6-9 says, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under GOD's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under GOD's curse!

Galatians 2:15-16 says, "We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So, we too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

2. The Sacraments—A true church rightly celebrates the LORD's Supper and baptism. That is, the sacraments must be conducted in line with Scripture's clear teaching, and we must allow for latitude where such things are not so plain. For example, the biblical instruction on the mode of baptism is not as clear as we might like; thus, we cannot anathematize those who disagree with us in this specific area. Celebrating the sacraments correctly also involves keeping unrepentant sinners from partaking in these means of grace (church discipline). Though inseparably linked to the sacraments, sometimes we make special mention of church discipline as the third mark of the church.

When we experience His presence <u>daily</u> one day we wake up and realize that GOD has done something special in and through our lives. However, accomplishment is no longer what excites us. Instead, what excites us is knowing Him. Through those times, we become more acquainted with His love, grace, and power in our lives. When this happens, we are no longer focused on the outcome because the outcome is a result of our walk with Him. It is not the goal of our walk, but the by-product.

Here is a powerful lesson for us if we take it to heart. We must wait for GOD's timing and embrace wherever we are in any process that we find ourselves in. When we find contentment in that place, we begin to experience GOD in ways we never thought possible.

A Prayer for us believers: There is a heaven and a hell, and that Jesus will return to judge all people and to establish his eternal kingdom.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in GOD; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you." <u>John 14:1–2.</u>

Please, take a moment to do an inventory of your relationships. How many non-Christians are currently in your circle of

influence? And of these non-Christians in your circle, how many are you actively sharing GOD's love with?

In times of extraordinary crisis ordinary measures will not suffice. The world lives in such a time of crisis. Christians alone are in a position to rescue the perishing. We dare not settle down to try to live as if things were "normal." Nothing is normal while sin and lust and death roam the world, pouncing upon one and another till the whole population has been destroyed. LORD help me to respond like Isaiah, when he saw the extraordinary crisis around him, "LORD, here am I; send me." Isaiah 6:8

GOD desires us to know Him: "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD" Jeremiah 24:7, Hebrews 8:10-11. The apostle John tells us that "no one has ever seen GOD, but the one and only Son, who is himself GOD has made him known." John 1:18.

Jesus Himself affirmed, "If you knew me, you would know my Father also". John 14:7. Even though we can't comprehend everything about GOD, John says everyone who knows Jesus knows Him.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment. Proverbs 9:10

If you do not see His glory being reflected through your life, then you need to ask why. He has promised to do so if we walk in obedience to His commands.

GOD's grace is ever cascading over the waterfall of the present from the inexhaustible river of grace coming to us from the future into the ever-increasing reservoir of grace in the past. In the next five minutes, you will receive sustaining grace flowing to you from the future, and you will accumulate another five minutes' worth of grace in the reservoir of the past.

Today I acknowledge that there are no coincidences in the life of a prayer warrior, just GOD-incidences!

Help me, LORD, to be faithful and see evidences of Your control over the circumstances in my life.

LORD, take me to my knees in worship. Then let me go to share with the world, or at least with anyone with whom I might have meaningful contact, a great and majestic GOD Who deserves their worship. Amen

Today I will focus on GOD's deliverance and stand strong trusting Him for the future.

The LORD is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. Psalm 145.

If you set your heart to speak out for Christ when the opportunity comes, the power of GOD to fulfill this resolve will come to you as you trust his future grace in the promise: "Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour". Matthew 10:19.

May GOD increase our daily faith in his inexhaustible, blood-bought, Christ-exalting future grace.

I have a neighbor, LORD, who may soon enter a Christless eternity. Give me boldness to share; give him faith to believe—today! Amen.

Here is a simple yet powerful word, that if faithfully applied to the various situations in our life will yield "FANTASTIC" results. "We should just reach out to Jesus and have faith". (It is wise to turn difficult situations over to GOD as soon as we recognize them). What better way to deal with issues?

LORD, may I use Your Word as an encouragement to endure with hope in You.

Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel: 2 “I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you. The LORD has said to me, ‘You shall not cross the Jordan.’ 3 The LORD your GOD himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua also will cross over ahead of you, as the LORD said. 4 And the LORD will do to them what he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, whom he destroyed along with their land. 5 The LORD will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded you. 6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your GOD goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.”

7 Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, “be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. 8 The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” Deuteronomy 31:1-8.

Dear Reader. Do NOT be discouraged, afraid, or terrified in your own life circumstances, for HE will NEVER leave you nor forsake you if you are His. This is a promise from the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY. He cannot lie!! BUT.....do you have Him,? Does He have you? That is the question. In summary, you have Him if you have asked to have Him, He has you if you have asked that He have you. Only you know the answer to this. He will never leave you nor forsake you if you have given yourself to Him. We need to be IN Him and He in us.

Heavenly Father, when I'm feeling discouraged and distressed, please remind me through Your Holy Spirit that You'll never leave me nor forsake me.

"And we know that the Son of GOD has come, and he has given us understanding so that we can know the true GOD. And now we live in fellowship with the true GOD because we live in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only true GOD, and He is eternal life." 1 John 5:20.

Have you ever questioned GOD's love for you based on circumstances that came your way? The cross at Calvary answers the love question. He sent His own Son in replacement for your sin. If you were the only person on earth, He would have done the same. His ways cannot always be understood or reconciled in our finite minds. That must be left for a future time when all will be understood. For now, entrust your life to Him completely. Embrace Him in the hard times and the good.

GOD put Christ forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show GOD's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:25-26.

The New Testament message embraces a great deal more than an offer of free pardon. It is a message of pardon, and for that may GOD be praised; but it is also a message of repentance. It is a message of atonement, but it is also a message of temperance and righteousness and GODliness in this present world. It tells us that we must accept a SAVIOR, but it tells us also that we must deny unGODliness and worldly lusts. The gospel message includes the idea of amendment, of separation from the world, of cross-carrying and loyalty to the kingdom of GOD even unto death.

LORD, please help me to proclaim the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth as I present the Gospel today. Amen.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4.

Today I will focus on the needs and interests of others rather than on my own.

In regard to having a happy marriage: An approach to issues dealt with in anger and condemnation will never improve a marriage circumstance. GOD tells us the correct and proper way to handle issues when they come up. "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." Ephesians 4:2. This is the way to address problems and differences in a marriage effectively.

Differences in relationships can cause great frustration—in the church and in marriage. But managed correctly i.e., as the Bible instructs (Biblically/Scripturally) they can help us become more Christlike.

Heavenly Father, please use our differences to help us mature. To learn how to strengthen your marriage.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise. Psalm 111:10.

For the LORD GOD is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless. Psalm 84:11.

GOD has a specific plan for the people who fully trust in Him. He promises to be their shield, to bestow honor on them. He will not withhold any good things from them. What a promise! What motivation to be all that we can be in GOD.

Imagine living a life that GOD views as blameless, which allows Him to withhold no good thing. Pray that GOD would make you and me that kind of person.

The gospel is the enjoyment of fellowship with GOD himself. This is made explicit in 1 Peter 3:18 in the phrase "that he might bring us to GOD.

All the other gifts of the gospel exist to make this one possible.

We are forgiven so that our guilt does not keep us away from GOD.

We are justified so that our condemnation does not keep us away from GOD.

We are given eternal life now, with new bodies in the resurrection, so that we have the capacities for enjoying GOD to the fullest.

In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16:11.

So, he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, "bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 22:12-13.

We have such a short time to prepare for such a long time. By that I mean we have now to prepare for then. We have an hour to prepare for eternity. To fail to prepare is an act of moral folly. For anyone to have a day given to prepare, it is an act of inexcusable folly to let anything hinder that preparation. If we find ourselves in a spiritual rut, nothing in the world should hinder us. Nothing in this world is worth it. If we believe in eternity, if we believe in GOD, if we believe in the eternal existence of the soul, then there is nothing important enough to cause us to commit such an act of moral folly.

Failing to get ready in time for eternity, and failing to get ready now for the great eternity that lies out yonder, is a trap in plain sight. There is an odd saying in the Old Testament, how useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds (Proverbs 1:17). When the man of GOD wrote that, he gave the birds a little credit. It would be silly for a bird watching me set the trap to conveniently fly down and get into it. Yet there are people doing that all the time. People who have to live for eternity fall into that trap set for them in plain sight.

Wealth does not interfere with everyone's discipleship Gen 13:2; Luke 8:1-3, and not everyone needs to sell all his possessions. Nor are the poor inevitably "better Christians" than the wealthy. Yet riches stood between this man and Christ; thus, he had to surrender his money. Likewise, we all must abandon idols. Will we cling to that which keeps us from full commitment to Jesus, or will we surrender all that we have to the LORD?

Even though not every Christian is called to sell all his possessions, one commentator has helpfully noted that those who find comfort that this call is not universal are precisely those to whom Jesus would issue it! As citizens of the wealthiest culture to ever appear on the planet, we Westerners must be perpetually careful that our standard of living is not our idol. What comforts would Jesus have you surrender for the sake of His kingdom?

Today I will destroy my enemies only with love.

LORD GOD, give me Your kind of love for my enemies so they too will love You.

The prophet Nathan came to David after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba. The backstory to this psalm can be found in 2 Samuel 11-12 where we read that David refused to confess his double sin of murdering Uriah and committing adultery with Bathsheba for almost a year. GOD then sent the prophet Nathan to confront him. After repenting from his sins, many scholars believe David penned Psalms 32 and 51 (Some scholars add Psalm 86 as well). Psalm 51 is one of the seven "penitential psalms" (also Psalms 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, and 143) so called because the writer, in repentant sorrow, confessed his sins and turned to GOD for His mercy and forgiveness. Psalm 51 has become a model prayer for believers in Jesus today as we seek GOD to forgive our sins.

Dear GOD, thank You for walking alongside me and placing people in my life who helped to make me who I am today.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. Ephesians 1:18.

We must so consider GOD, when we come to Him in prayer, as to see Him in what we desire.

Even true believers have great want of heavenly wisdom. We need light as well as wisdom.

It is GOD, by the Spirit of Christ, who works in us all to develop true wisdom.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Philippians 1:21. Revelation 21:1-5 captures the most complete description of what is referred to as the new heaven and new earth. John saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from GOD, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. When Jesus promised in John 14:2 that he was going to prepare a place for his disciples, this Holy City is the place he was referring to. This eternal home will truly be "heaven on earth," for GOD will re-create his world as a great and beautiful city with streets, protecting walls, a life-giving river and the tree of life, all lit by the glory of GOD in his inexpressible beauty. The triune GOD himself will live in that city with his people. All sorrow will be gone. GOD's children will worship him forever, accompanied by the angels. Believers will worship GOD with the great songs of heaven and by exploring GOD's new creation and through the fellowship of the saints. Believers will reign with Christ and be responsible for governing various parts of GOD's kingdom. It will be a bliss that never ends!

WHAT IT MEANS TO BLESS THE LORD.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Psalm 103:1.

The psalm begins and ends with the psalmist preaching to his soul to bless the LORD—and preaching to the angels and the hosts of heaven and the works of GOD's hands. The psalm is overwhelmingly focused on blessing the LORD. What does it mean to bless the LORD? It means to speak well of his greatness and goodness.

What David is doing in the first and last verses of this psalm, when he says, "Bless the LORD, O my soul," is saying that speaking about GOD's goodness and greatness must come from the soul.

Blessing GOD with the mouth without the soul would be hypocrisy. Jesus said, this people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Matthew 15:8. David knows that danger, and he is preaching to himself that it does not happen.

Come, soul, look at the greatness and goodness of GOD. Join my mouth and let us bless the LORD with our whole being.

LORD Jesus, give me that broken heart, give me that bond of compassion, as I interact with unsaved people in my ministry today. Amen.

The only way anyone will ever be saved is if GOD operates entirely apart from us and for his own good pleasure. We are tempted to look at our own efforts for our salvation and to believe that all "good people" will be saved, no matter their religious affiliation. It is therefore vital to constantly remind ourselves that none of us would love and serve GOD apart from His grace. His grace enables for us to find an avenue toward salvation.

"One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple…Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD." Psalm 27:4, 6. As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children with those who keep his covenants and remember to obey his precepts. Psalm 103:13.

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now, is our salvation nearer than when we believed. Romans 13:11.

Psalm 103 reminds worshipers of GOD's mercy (verse 8 says that The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. Reassuring them that His compassion, love, and faithfulness are greater than their weakness and sin. All are invited to experience the joy of worshiping Him.

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of GOD does not have life. 1 John 5:12.

Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called that you may obtain a blessing. He who would love life and see good days let him turn away from evil and do good. 1 Peter 3: 9.

The only way to have the power to follow Christ in the costly way of love is to be filled with hope, with strong confidence that if we lose our life doing his will, we will find it again and be richly rewarded.

LORD, you desire faithfulness and perseverance. Help me develop these qualities in my life.

Which circumstances are threatening to crush you? How do the examples of Bible characters inspire you to exhibit faith in GOD?

Dear GOD, please strengthen me to meet the challenges I face today.

I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Psalm 16: 8.

Hezekiah was a GODly king of Israel. During his reign the king of Assyria threatened to attack Israel and wipe them out.

King Hezekiah saved Israel because of one act. He prayed; and because he prayed, GOD moved on his behalf. In fact, GOD moved so powerfully that Hezekiah did not even have to fight the battle.

GOD gave VICTORY !! The angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning, there were all the dead bodies. Isaiah 37:36.

Please take time right now to read about King Hezekiah and his reign. It will strengthen your faith tremendously.

I have in fact been in these types of situations many times in my own life. I can tell you from personal experience that when I tried to handle the situations myself, I was unsuccessful but when I stopped, took time to pray and gave it over to GOD, I literally saw Him take the problems and handle them miraculously. This is an absolute fact. This is a true statement. Believe it or not ! The choice is yours. I know what I know. I have observed what I have observed. It works. Start today and when you run into problems, turn them over to GOD to handle and then rest in knowing that He is faithful. Then listen and watch. You will be amazed!

GOD is a wonderfully good GOD and He WANTS to help us. If only we would ask! GOD wants to act on behalf of His children if they will call on Him. One of the motives Hezekiah had in seeking GOD's help was so that all kingdoms on earth may know that You alone, O LORD, are GOD. Isaiah:37:20.

He can deliver. Seek Him today for the problems in your life. Keep your motives pure and GOD will surely answer.

Let's discuss "WORDS" for a moment. Ask yourself if your words build up or tear down. Do your words push others away from you or draw others near? Most important, do they draw others to GOD? It's never too late to dispense apples of gold in settings of silver. Seek someone who is downcast and whisper a word of

encouragement. You never know who needs to hear the words. Remember words are incredibly powerful.

The resurrection of Jesus is GOD's declaration to Israel and to the world that we cannot work our way to glory but that he intends to do the impossible to get us there.

The resurrection is the promise of GOD that all who trust Jesus will be the beneficiaries of GOD's power to lead us in paths of righteousness and through the valley of death.

Therefore, believing in your heart that GOD raised Jesus from the dead is much more than accepting a fact. It means being confident that GOD is for you, that he has closed ranks with you, that he is transforming your life, and that he will save you for eternal joy.

Believing in the resurrection means trusting in all the promises of life and hope and righteousness for which it stands.

It means being so confident of GOD's power and love that no fear of worldly loss or greed for worldly gain will lure us to disobey his will.

That's the difference between Satan and the saints. May GOD circumcise our hearts to love him and to rest in the resurrection of his Son.

LORD, I don't need another name in my file, another notch on my belt. But I would like the privilege today of bringing someone to the point of salvation so he could become a genuine worshiper of You. Use me today I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

GOD is a debtor to no man. Our LORD has the sovereign right to do as He wills, says John Calvin, and "men have no right to complain of the bounty of GOD, when he honors unworthy persons by large rewards beyond what they deserve." Though our Father's favor may fall disproportionately on those who to us seem to be the least deserving, no one can accuse Him of giving less than what He has promised in. Matthew 20:13–16.

I resolve to persevere, with faith in a good GOD, through all the trials that come my way. In Jesus' Mighty Holy Name.

By prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to GOD and the peace of GOD, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7.

Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. These are the kind of things you should always try to thing about. Not negative things! Philippians 4:8-9.

According to the apostle Paul, nothing is more valuable than our intimacy with Christ and the righteousness that comes through our faith in Him. Philippians 3:8–9. His life proved that knowing Jesus and the power of His resurrection changes us, impacting the way we live and the way we respond when trials disrupt our lives. When we spend time with GOD's Son daily, the Holy Spirit equips us with the truth we need—enabling us to face every challenge on this earth in ways that reflect Christ's character. We can be beacons of GOD's love and hope, cutting through the darkness until the day He calls us home or comes again.

Do not live in the past. Do not hold onto bitterness that may hinder GOD from doing new and exciting things in your life. He turns our wastelands into streams of water to give life, not death. How have you viewed your past? Has it hindered you in some areas of your life? Have you relied on past successes to dictate what you will do in the future? Put aside such thoughts and allow GOD to do a new thing in your life. Ask Him to help you see the new things He wants to do in and through you today.

When your memories are bigger than your dreams, you're headed for the grave.

Dear LORD Jesus, I don't want to worship you only on Sunday mornings. I want to worship you with every word, every thought, every breath, all the time. Amen.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:18–20.

May the GOD who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had. Romans 15:5.

Today I will seek to find ways to help and encourage others to go through some of the same challenges that I have faced.

Dear precious LORD, give me the mind of Jesus toward others in order that Your endurance and encouragement may flow through me.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. Matthew 7:24. The person who hears and yet doesn't obey, is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

There are two options regarding how to live our lives: Build our lives on the solid foundation of obedience to Him or on the unstable sand of our own ways. It is our choice.

Dear Jesus, help me to abide in You so that when the storms rise and the winds blow, I'll remain true to You, established forever by Your grace.

Sin makes our armor vulnerable to attack from satan, who then gains permission from GOD to attack us in the area where we have failed to uphold righteousness. If we break down in moral purity, satan comes in and establishes a stronghold. If we give place to bitterness and unforgiveness, we will break fellowship with GOD and others. If we become money-focused, we will fall into greed and deception. It is a vicious cycle.

Examine your armor today. Make sure you are not susceptible to attack. Begin from a solid spiritual foundation and your chances of success will be great.

Make no mistake about it, GOD is the provider for all who trust him. Luke 4:25-26.

All the works of GOD culminate in the praises of his redeemed people. The climax of his happiness is the delight he takes in the echoes of his excellence in the praises of the saints. This praise is the consummation of our own joy in GOD.

Therefore, GOD's pursuit of praise from us and our pursuit of pleasure in him are the same pursuit. This is the great gospel!

GOD comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves received from GOD. 2 Corinthians 1:4.

LEARN TO LIVE EACH DAY AS THOUGH IT WERE YOUR LAST !

I will live today as though it were my last: loving, forgiving, serving!

Teach GOD's ways and instructions to your children and to their children after them. Deuteronomy 4:9.

Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Proverbs 4:6-7.

Wisdom is obtained by reading The Word (teaching) and personal experience (application).

We do not need to fear entering the presence of GOD even if it means entering through a period of darkness. Above all else we must believe that GOD is a GOD of love. If He calls us into darkness in order to enter His presence, then that darkness will become an entry to new levels of relationship with a GOD who longs for fellowship with you and me.

GOD created humanity to have LORDship over all things. But not yet. Christ has become one with man, sharing with man his temptations, sufferings, even death itself, that he might enable humanity to become one with him, to share with him his nature and his rule. Jesus participated in our nature and in our sufferings on earth so that he could be a sympathetic mediator between GOD and humanity. He understands our weaknesses and intercedes for us in the presence of GOD the Father. And because of this, Christ has been crowned with glory and honor. Now humankind has the assurance that Christ is gracious, kind, and understanding, and will help those who love him to become one with him and thus qualify for his glorious inheritance.

I look around me, LORD, and everywhere I see aimless wanderers on a course toward eternal destruction. Help me to be more faithful, even today, to point them toward the right destination. Amen.

Following Christ in a world that hates Him is difficult and often earns for us outright persecution from His enemies. This strain can be hard to bear and would be impossible to endure without the comforting promise of Jesus. Just as His suffering would result finally in His glory, so too do we know that our travails will one day give way to resurrected life in His presence. Think about these things when you encounter trouble for serving our LORD and SAVIOR.

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me. Psalm 13:5-6.

I ask, LORD, for the grace to be able to vocalize my trust and joy and praise of You!

Dear GOD, help me pursue You and Your wisdom for my life instead of the fleeting things that I sometimes seek.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6.

Write your plans in pencil and give GOD the eraser.

Thank you LORD for Your faithfulness in all the trials I face. Help me not waste them.

My help comes from the LORD.

Psalm 121

A song of ascents.

1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains,
Where does my help come from?
2 My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
3 He will not let your foot slip,
He who watches over you will not slumber.
4 Indeed, He who watches over Israel.
will neither slumber nor sleep.
5 The LORD watches over you,
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
6 The sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
7 The LORD will keep you from all harm, and
He will watch over your life.
8 The LORD will watch over your coming and going,
both now and forevermore.

As we trust and obey GOD, we can look ahead with hope, knowing we're within the protective boundaries of His wisdom and love.

Thank you Dear GOD !!!! As I reflect back on events in my life, I have but one thing to say. Thank you Dear GOD. I have

personally seen and experienced literal miracles many times in my life despite my own stubborn self-will. He has been merciful to me many times. You can trust Him if you only will. "ASK and you SHALL receive". Two things are necessary when we need His help. (And we always need His help even when we don't realize it) First ask, and secondly, give thanks when He helps you. Don't forget these two very important pieces of the process. He wants to help you. But you must want help. I can testify to this.....I needed help. I asked for help. I received help. Please believe me as this is true and from my own personal experience!

What kind of help do you need from GOD today? How does knowing He's the Maker of heaven and earth encourage you? Father, thank You for being my source of help on my life's journey.

The apostle Paul's offers timely encouragement for fearful saints: "For GOD gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." Paul calls young Timothy to follow his example of fearlessness in suffering and faithfulness in ministry. 2 Timothy 1:7.

No nation is immune from GOD's judgment. Pray for your nation today. Pray that your nation will have a repentant heart among the leaders and the people.

Sovereign GOD, I'm Your servant. I'll share the message, I'll pray for response, but only You can draw an unsaved person to faith in Christ. Thank You for the privilege of having even a small part in Your sovereign work. Amen.

Dear LORD GOD, please help me never to turn back from following and serving You.

You do not have because you do not ask GOD. James 4:2.

Sometimes we're needlessly on edge because we don't ask GOD for help.

When life gets complicated, we need reminders like the one from the hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear,

all because we do not carry, everything to GOD in prayer.

Philippians: 4: 4-7.

4 Rejoice in the LORD always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The LORD is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to GOD. 7 And the peace of GOD, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The LORD is near. The reason we can rejoice in any situation, the reason we can "let our gentleness be evident to all," the reason we can obey Paul's exhortation not to "be anxious about anything" is because Jesus is near. Scholars debate whether this means His return is near or if Paul means He's close to us. Either interpretation should have a similar effect for our understanding. He's with us via the Holy Spirit, and He promises to return for us. John 14:3.

GOD's plans may not always seem to follow our natural inclination. Perhaps GOD has you taking a path that may not lead to His ultimate destination for you. Trust in the LORD, lean not on your own understanding, acknowledge Him in all you do, and He shall direct your path. Proverbs 3:5-6.

Self-Discipline may seem difficult; but it makes the difficulties of life easier in the long run. How do you practice discipline in your life? What are the benefits of discipline both being a disciplined person and accepting correction occasionally? Don't allow pride to keep you from learning and accepting the tenets of discipline. Discipline can be a very beneficial part of developing your character.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works, who looks on the earth and it trembles, who

touches the mountains, and they smoke! I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my GOD while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD. Psalm 104: 31–34).

The enjoyment of GOD is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy GOD, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. They are but shadows; but GOD is the substance. These are but scattered beams; but GOD is the sun. These are but streams; but GOD is the ocean (This is a quote from Jonathan Edwards).

I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, "They are my people, and they will say, The LORD is our GOD." Zechariah 13:9.

Dear LORD, please build patience, endurance, character and hope into my life in Your way and purpose.

Boasting About Tomorrow
James 4:13–17.

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the LORD's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. 17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

Life is brief, quick, and more fragile than we often realize. Planning is necessary, but the sin of presumption is in the assumption that we're in control. That's why James warns us not to "boast in [our] arrogant schemes," for "all such boasting is evil".

The way to avoid this sinful practice is through grateful participation with GOD. Gratitude reminds us that He's the source of every "good and perfect gift". Then when we come to GOD, we ask Him not to simply bless our present and future plans but to help us join Him in what He's doing. This is what it means to pray, "If it is the LORD's will."

Whoever has contempt for their neighbor has no sense, but the one who has understanding holds their tongue.

Jesus answered, the work of GOD is this: to believe in the one he has sent. John 6:29.

Peace be with you! John 20:19

Have you experienced this grace in your life? Have you extended grace to those who have hurt you? Can you let go of any wrongs that have come through friends or associates? The grace you extend may change their lives and yours.

GOD loves a cheerful giver!

You reap what you sow! If you sow very little seed, you will harvest very little. If you spread love you will reap love. If you sow hatred, you will reap hatred. Be very careful what you sow in this life.

There is no disease, no addiction, no demon, no bad habit, no fault, no vice, no weakness, no temper, no moodiness, no pride, no self-pity, no strife, no jealousy, no perversion, no greed, no laziness that Christ does not aim to overcome as the enemy of his honor. And the encouragement in that promise is that when you set yourself to do battle with the enemies of your faith and your holiness, you will not fight alone. Jesus Christ is now, in this age, putting all his enemies under his feet. Every rule and every authority and every power will be conquered. So, remember that the extent of Christ's reign reaches to the smallest and biggest enemy of his glory. It will be defeated.

And He said to them, you are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins. John 8:23-24.

His claim to be GOD stirred the Pharisees to fury. He could have cooled the fire of their anger by backing away from His claim to equality with GOD, but He refused to do it.

And He further taught that faith in Him embraced a belief that He is very GOD, and that apart from this there could be no salvation for anyone.

To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only GOD, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true GOD, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3). For GOD so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16.

As we spread the good news of the Gospel, it's not up to us which seeds will survive. Our job is simply to sow the gospel—to tell others about Jesus: Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Mark 16:15.

Each day, we rub shoulders with someone who has not met this Jesus we know personally. GOD uses needs to draw us to Himself. What need has He placed in an acquaintance or relative that only Christ can meet? Perhaps you are the instrument He wants to use to introduce that person to Himself. It requires availability and a willingness to look for people with needs, then point them to Christ to meet their needs. Pray for divine appointments today.

Jesus can change our hearts. He wants us to have a heart like his. Can you imagine a better offer? The heart of Jesus was pure. Jesus' heart was peaceful. His heart was purposeful. His heart was spiritual. GOD's plan for you is nothing short of a new heart. If you were a car, GOD would want control of your engine. If you were a computer, GOD would claim the software and the hard drive. If you were an airplane, he'd take his seat in the

cockpit. But you are a person, so GOD wants to change your heart.

The infinite regard that the Father has for the Son makes it possible for me, a wicked sinner, to be loved and accepted in the Son, because in his death he vindicated the worth and glory of his Father.

I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have complete confidence that they understand GOD's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself. Colossians 2:2.

IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS!

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. Psalm 95:1–2.

Worship GOD for who he is and for all He has done for you.

We daily acknowledge GOD for who he is and what he has done for us. We worship GOD, privately and corporately, with the songs we sing, the words we speak, and the way we live our lives. When we attribute worth to GOD as a child of GOD, unmerited worth is attributed to us.

GOD saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. 2 Timothy 1:9.

Being "IN CHRIST" !!!

If you are "IN CHRIST" listen to what it means for YOU and recognize the riches that are YOURS. Notice that this is backed by the Holy Scriptures.

- **In Christ Jesus you were given grace before the world was created. He gave us grace in Christ Jesus before the ages began. 2 Timothy 1:9.**

- **In Christ Jesus you were chosen by GOD before creation. GOD chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Ephesians 1:4.**

- **In Christ Jesus you are loved by GOD with an inseparable love. I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of GOD in Christ Jesus our LORD Romans 8:38–39.**

- **In Christ Jesus you were redeemed and forgiven for all your sins. In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses. Ephesians 1:7.**

- **In Christ Jesus you are justified before GOD and the righteousness of GOD in Christ is imputed to you. For our sake GOD made Christ to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of GOD. 2nd Corinthians 5:21.**

- **In Christ Jesus you have become a new creation and a son of GOD. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. Galatians 3:26.**

- **In Christ Jesus you are all sons of GOD, through faith. 2 Corinthians 5:17.**

- **In Christ Jesus you have been seated in the heavenly places even while he lived on earth. GOD raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:6.**

- **In Christ Jesus all the promises of GOD are Yes for you. All the promises of GOD find their "Yes" in Christ. 2 Corinthians 1:20.**

- **In Christ Jesus you are being sanctified and made holy. To the church of GOD that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus. 1 Corinthians 1:2.**
- **In Christ Jesus everything you really need will be supplied. My GOD will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19.**
- **In Christ Jesus the peace of GOD will guard your heart and mind. The peace of GOD, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7.**
- **In Christ Jesus you have eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of GOD is eternal life in Christ Jesus our LORD. Romans 6:23.**
- **In Christ Jesus you will be raised from the dead at the coming of the LORD. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. All those united to Adam in the first humanity die. All those united to Christ in the new humanity will rise to live again. 1 Corinthians 15:22.**

Our Redeemer's cleansing of the temple at the very least illustrates how concerned He is with the purity of worship. Our corporate praise and prayer is something that is always in need of reformation, for it is easy for anti-Christian practices to slip in unnoticed. Consider the importance of pure worship from a devoted heart and make it your aim to show reverence and awe when you praise the LORD alongside His people.

Today I will rejoice in the LORD in the face of all the negatives that Satan tries to throw at me. LORD, you are worthy of my praise and joyfulness no matter what circumstances I am in.

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Matthew 5:14.

Our good deeds—humility, meekness, showing mercy, righteousness, having a pure heart, peacemaking—are to be on display to those watching. These are the kind of actions that point people to our good Father in heaven. Have you left your light on? As Jesus shines through you today, others may see and begin radiating His light too.

Dear LORD Jesus, help me to shine brightly so that others may be drawn to You.

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for He is our GOD, and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if only you would hear his voice. Psalm 95:6-7.

The secret of a great life is often a man's ability to discern the defining moments given to him, understanding them, and learning to walk in the path that leads him to his ultimate destination. Once you have had a defining moment, you are never the same. Pray that you have eyes to see and ears to hear when your Master brings a defining moment into your life.

Creation is GOD's universal proclamation of his nature, underpinning his special revelation through Christ and the Scriptures. As people who love and appreciate the beauty of the world, may we always remember to listen closely to the deeper truths of GOD's goodness and grandeur that whisper from the rushing stream or shout from the thunderclap. But may we always remember to recognize and acknowledge His creation but never forget to worship THE CREATOR.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. John 14:3.

PRIDE.....That evil deceiver !

Pride has traditionally been regarded as the greatest of all sins and with good reason. Those who are puffed up with themselves are too proud to admit their failures and need of GOD. The proud become so concerned with maintaining their

own prestige and power that they reject new ideas or information. Consider your life today and see if pride defines your character. Work to put any pride in your own abilities to death.

Today I will walk and talk in the power of the Holy Spirit and trust GOD to use me as a witness wherever He places me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Do you question if the Holy Spirit is active in your life? The LORD has promised that the Holy Spirit will convict us of sin when we move away from Him. It is His responsibility as our guide.

The body of Christ is designed to work together. If we ignore a brother or sister's need, we are ignoring Jesus, and we are weakening the body of Christ. The early church had it rough. They faced significant persecution, but they worked together, and they stayed strong. So should we.

On his way to Calvary, Jesus himself had legions at his disposal. No one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord John 10:17-18, of his own good pleasure, for the joy that is set before him. At the one point in the history of the universe where Jesus looked trapped, he was totally in charge doing precisely what he pleased, dying to justify the unGODly like you and me.

LORD, I don't hear much today of the greater importance that we have better Christians than that we have more of them. Help us in our seeker-orientation not to water down the message and make the teaching so shallow that we don't challenge our people to holy living. Amen.

Obedience today is the prerequisite for fuller knowledge of the things of GOD tomorrow.

Be ready.....Be ready.....Be ready !

Luke 12:35-40.

35 Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him. 37 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. 38 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. 39 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. 40 You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

The teaching for believers in Christ is clear: always be ready.

Day or night, it's always good to serve our SAVIOR. Even when darkness encroaches, His promises for all who look forward to Him will stand. Like candles in the darkness, may our light shine before others, that they may see, love and serve Him too. Matthew 5:16.

What would you do differently if you knew Jesus was coming tomorrow? How will you shine His light today?

Come soon, dear LORD Jesus! I pray You'll find me ready on that day, and that the way I live now will draw others to You.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1.

This is what the LORD says. Your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the LORD your GOD, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. Isaiah 48:17.

This was now the third time Jesus appeared to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. John 21:14.

There is One over whom sin has no power and over whom death has no hold. Only he is able to release those held hostage to the sin Adam allowed into the world.

Almighty Father, thank you for leading me toward my final home with you. I pray all of this through the power and strength of Jesus Christ my LORD and SAVIOR. Amen.

Total depravity is not just badness, but blindness to GOD's beauty and deadness to the deepest joy.

Unconditional election means that the completeness of our joy in Jesus was planned for us before we ever existed as the overflow of GOD's joy in the fellowship of the Trinity.

Limited atonement is the assurance that indestructible joy in GOD is infallibly secured for us by the blood of the new covenant.

Irresistible grace is the commitment and power of GOD's love to make sure we don't hold on to suicidal pleasures, and to set us free by the sovereign power of superior delights.

Perseverance of the saint is the almighty work of GOD not to let us fall into the final bondage of inferior pleasures, but to keep us, through all affliction and suffering, for an inheritance of fullness of joy in his presence and pleasures at his right hand forevermore.

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of GOD in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14).

LORD, keep me from the curse of self-righteousness. Show me my sin and need for continued growth. If revival is to come, it needs to start with me, and it won't start unless I'm constantly reminded of my need. Amen.

Let us never be so confident in our own goodness that we fail to recognize our need for repentance and forgiveness.

Loving Father, thank You for promising to be with me and for providing all that I need. You are absolutely faithful and kind.

In your hearts revere Christ as LORD. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:15.

The closer we come to Jesus' standards, the more we experience the blessing of GOD.

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the LORD and not to men. Colossians 3:23.

LORD, revive my zeal for things of GOD. I get caught up in the fever pitch of so many things. Help me to set my priorities right and give myself more completely to enhancing my relationship with You. Amen.

As Scripture tells us, words mean nothing if there are no deeds to back them up. It is easy to profess the truth, but our Father in heaven also demands that we do the truth as well.
James 2:14–26.

Those who initially refuse to submit to GOD but then turn to Him are His children, not those who honor Him with their lips and yet have hearts that never serve Him. Isa. 29:13–14.

Today, we have the amazing blessing of access to all sixty-six books of the Bible, a treasure of infinite worth. Not all people have this wonderful opportunity. In some parts of the world Bibles are not allowed and if one is caught in possession they may experience extreme persecution or even death. Oh, dear LORD GOD please never let us take this privilege for granted. The Bible is a TRUE TREASURE. We are truly blessed beyond measure.

As you are waiting on GOD to strengthen you in life's various circumstances, remember the words of the prophet Isaiah, "but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31.

GOD promises that He will never leave you nor forsake you. You may wander from Him at times, but He will always welcome you back if you are simply willing to repent and rush into his faithful loving and forgiving arms. Remember, "GOD is LOVE".

This is the nature of the GOD you serve, open armed, welcoming, slow to get angry, patient. Even right now he gives you the opportunity to return, to cherish him above all other pursuits. He does not push you away; he welcomes you into his arms. LORD, you are all I want. All I need. All I hope for. I don't know what I'd do without your compassionate love in my life every day. Thank you for loving me, even when I fail.

Test yourself. What is your mindset? Do you begin with GOD and his rights and goals? Or do you begin with yourself and your rights and wishes? When you look at the death of Christ, what happens? Does your joy really come from translating this awesome divine work into a boost for self-esteem? Or are you drawn up out of yourself and filled with wonder and reverence and worship that here in the death of Jesus is the deepest, clearest declaration of the infinite esteem of GOD for his glory and for his Son? Take your stand on this. Base your life on this. Ground your hope in this. You will be free from the futile mindset of the world. And you will never fall. When GOD's exaltation of GOD in Christ is your joy, it can never fail.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Matthew 5:6.

A dead body feels no hunger and the dead soul knows not the pangs of holy desire. "If you want GOD, said the old saint, you have already found Him. Our desire for fuller life is proof that some life must be there already. In nature everything moves in the direction of its hungers. In the spiritual world it is no different. We gravitate toward our inward longing, provided of course that those longings are strong enough to move us. Impotent dreaming will not do. The religious urge that is not followed by a corresponding act of the will in the direction of that urge is a waste of emotion.

Dear GOD, I have that longing to know You, that hunger and thirst for righteousness, that desire for fuller life. Move me along in the direction of that hunger, LORD, and give me the strength to follow in the direction of that urge. Amen.

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial. James 1:2-8.

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking any thing if you lack ask GOD who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the LORD. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all their ways. James 1: 2-8.

Jesus said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." John 14:23.

Significance comes from fulfilling the GOD-given purpose for which you were made. Ask Him to confirm this in your own life.

I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil. This is the gift of GOD Ecclesiastes 3:12-13.

Is not His love for us his eagerness to do for us all He must do (including die for us) so that we can marvel at Him and not be incinerated by Him? Redemption, propitiation, forgiveness, justification, reconciliation — all these have to happen. They are the act of love. But the goal of love that makes those acts loving is that we be with Him and see His jaw-dropping glory and be astounded. In those moments we forget ourselves and see and feel Him.

I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Isaiah 42:8.

Consider this day the fruit you are producing in the form of good works of service, progress in sanctification, discipleship, and other such things.

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." Luke 6:37.

Forgiveness. Without it, there is no real Christian life. Today I will obey the LORD and forgive everyone who has hurt me.

Proverbs 25:16–28

16 If you find honey, eat just enough—too much of it, and you will vomit.
17 Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house—too much of you, and they will hate you.

18 Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is one who gives false testimony against a neighbor.
19 Like a broken tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in a time of trouble.
20 Like one who takes away your garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.
21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.
22 In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.
23 Like a north wind that brings unexpected rain is a sly tongue—which provokes a horrified look.
24 Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.
25 Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land.
26 Like a muddied spring or a polluted well are the righteous who give way to the wicked.
27 It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to search out matters that are too deep.
28 Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.

In the Bible, what's the difference between a proverb and a promise? A promise is a statement that's true all the time. In contrast, the proverbs found in the book of Proverbs are sayings that are generally true and are derived from observing life. Proverbs contain wisdom obtained from living among broken and sinful people, whereas a promise comes from an eternal and unchanging GOD. We can depend on GOD to fulfill His promises, while proverbs can be true depending on how people respond to a situation.

So many of the proverbs are about self-control. "If you find honey, eat just enough," wrote the wise man. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit that guards us, protecting us from losing ground to impatience, bitterness, greed, and other pests that can intrude and destroy GOD's harvest in our lives. Self-control

is a healthy mindedness that watches for the holes in the walls of our lives and keeps them patched.

This world we live in is GOD's world. Not a bacterium is hidden from his sight. No late-night dream in the recesses of a person's consciousness or a demonic scheme made in the counsel of darkness escapes GOD's full awareness. No world power, no molecule, no stoplight is out of his control. We pray to GOD, and he can respond because every iota of existence answers to him.

In the light of history, we're able to fill in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream with the names of kingdoms that have now come and gone. Most Biblical scholars name the four successive empires represented by the four metals as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. GOD came to earth during the Roman Empire, and his kingdom still stands—now and forever.

In Romans 8:34 it says plainly, "Christ Jesus is the one who died and more than that, who was raised — who is at the right hand of GOD, who indeed is interceding for us." The reason Paul can say that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ is because Christ is alive and is still loving us now. He is at the right hand of GOD and is therefore ruling for us. And he is interceding for us, which means he is seeing to it that his finished work of redemption does in fact save us hour by hour and bring us safely to eternal joy. His love is not a memory. It is a moment-by-moment action by the omnipotent, living Son of GOD, to bring us to everlasting joy.

This love of Christ is effective in protecting us from separation, and therefore is not a universal love for all, but a particular love for his people — those who, according to Romans 8:28, love GOD and are called according to his purpose.

This is the love spoken of in Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her." It is Christ's love for the church, his bride. Christ has a love for all, and he has a special, saving, preserving love for his bride. You know you are part of that bride if you trust Christ. Anyone — no exceptions — anyone who trusts Christ can say, I am part of his

bride, his church, his called and chosen ones, the ones who are kept and protected forever no matter what.

This omnipotent, effective, protecting love does not spare us from calamities in this life, but brings us safely to everlasting joy with GOD.

Death will happen to us, but it will not separate us. So, when Paul says that the "sword" will not separate us from the love of Christ, he means: even if we are killed we are not separated from the love of Christ.

So, the sum of the matter in is this: Jesus Christ is mightily loving his people with omnipotent, moment-by-moment love that does not always rescue us from calamity but preserves us for everlasting joy in his presence even through suffering and death.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Matthew 16:24.

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you of your sins. Mark 11:25.

Forgiveness is the very core of the gospel message. I am a Christian only because GOD forgave me everything. There is no other ground on which to stand, not my repentance, not my praying the sinner's prayer. Nothing made me a child of GOD except GOD forgave. And He did it two thousand years ago through Jesus on the cross. Jesus took all that sin and nailed it to the cross and He says, "Now, go, and put it into practice".

Today I will confront my own trials and forgive those against whom I am holding anything.

Praise GOD from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below. He is worthy to be praised. He is above all things. He is ALMIGHTY GOD. Above Him is NO OTHER !

He is and has been, a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm. Isaiah 25:1-9.

1 LORD, you are my GOD; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness, you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago.
2 You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.
3 Therefore strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you.
4 You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall
5 and like the heat of the desert. You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled.
6 On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.
7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all of the nations.
8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; He will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.
9 In that day they will say, "Surely this is our GOD; we trusted in him, and He saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

The "strong peoples" and "ruthless nations" mentioned in Isaiah 25 likely refer to the Assyrians led by Sennacherib, the ever-present villain during the time of Isaiah's ministry. For people of Jerusalem cowering behind the fortifications set up by the mighty King David long ago, Isaiah's testimony rang with hope. The violence of Assyria might crash against Jerusalem like a "storm driving against a wall" but GOD Himself would be their shelter. He would silence their oppressors. And, like their ancestor David in Psalm 23 they'd enjoy a feast in the presence of their enemies.

When have you taken "refuge" in GOD, what was the outcome? My guess is that you FOUND that refuge in Him. What did you learn about His faithfulness when you needed Him?

Dear GOD of refuge, please empower me, your child, to help the needy find refuge and hope.

Teach me to do your will, for you are my GOD; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. Psalm 143:10.

GOD's Word is life to our souls. It provides knowledge that leads to life. The prophet Hosea tells us, "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as My priests; because you have ignored the law of your GOD, I also will ignore your children." Hosea. 4:6.

GOD has given us His Word that has specific laws and principles that must be followed if we expect His blessing.

Some of us believe that we can violate GOD's Word without consequences. This is not true; the LORD stands by to uphold His Word. It can be life, or it can bring death. When GOD provides instructions, we need to follow them. Knowing this about GOD brings a healthy fear of the LORD. We must all have a fearful respect of GOD's Word. For truly, it is life or death. Do you take GOD's Word seriously? Is it life or death for you? Do you feed upon His Word daily so that you might know Him and know His precepts? Feed upon this knowledge and be blessed of GOD.

Fear not! Your adversaries can do no more than what GOD permits. And he will grant you the faith you need to endure if you will look to Him. These promises are blood bought and sealed. Gospel promises. In this world there will always be some adversity and/or adversaries. But, we then have choices as to how we will handle them. There are 2 ways. Our way or GOD's way. The choice is always yours. We have been given a free will regarding how we deal with various issues.

Modern mankind can go everywhere, do everything and be completely curious about the universe. But only a rare person now and then is curious enough to want to know the GOD who created it all. "Oh LORD, show me Your glory. I don't want to be satisfied with just a second-hand picture of You; I want to sense Your living presence with me today. I long to know You. Amen."

My spiritual clothing that I wear in this world is the perfect righteousness of Christ. Take the time to consider this. Be fully dressed spiritually enjoy that privilege.

Justifying faith is active, demonstrating itself in good deeds. James 2:14–26 says, we must distinguish justification, the only way we can stand before the Creator, from sanctification — our working out of salvation by serving others and becoming more like Jesus in Philippians 2:12–13. Still, justification and sanctification are inseparable, and we cannot have one without the other.

Matthew Henry comments, "Those, and those only, who put on the LORD Jesus, and to whom He is all in all, have wedding clothes." Personal, saving trust in Christ is necessary to be a part of His banquet. Such faith perseveres until the end of life by feeding on the Word of GOD preached and read and the Word of GOD made visible in the sacraments. Take time daily to pray for consistency in your faith and make use of the means of grace to strengthen your trust in Jesus.

Forgiveness! The literal meaning of the word "forgiveness" in the New Testament is "to release; to hurl away; to free yourself." The only way to break the chain or cycle of hurtfulness is to stop and ask forgiveness. This allows a relationship to start over and begin anew. The Russian writer, Solzhenitsyn, believed forgiveness is what truly makes us different from animals. Only humans can perform the most unnatural act of forgiveness that transcends the relentless law of nature.

Today I will ask forgiveness, as Jesus said—of people I have hated and treated poorly. Thank You Father for Your example in loving the just and the unjust. Help me to practice this as Your child.

Precious Holy Lamb of GOD, thank You for Your sacrifice. Enable me to celebrate You in my heart as well as with others in the family of faith daily. In Jesus' name, amen.

There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one LORD, one faith, one baptism, one GOD and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Titus 2:2.

During King Darius's reign, while Daniel is praying for his people, Gabriel comes and tells Daniel that GOD has heard his prayer. Gabriel then gives Daniel cryptic, yet specific, information about the coming of the Messiah. GOD has throngs of angels around his throne. He has the universe to run. If there is a pressing agenda, it is GOD's. But our prayers push through the throng to him. He hears and answers.

Temptation

What does our Bible say regarding Temptation? First let's look at what temptation is. (Terminology); The Hebrew noun massâ, ordinarily translated as "temptation", is derived from the verb nāsâ, meaning to try, prove, put to the test). We often look at temptation as a circumstance in which we must make a moral choice as to whether we will choose to do either right or wrong (think; steal or not steal). When additionally, temptation can also mean according to the terminology, trials, problems, difficult circumstances that we may encounter in our life that sometimes seem to be more than we can stand. However, GOD tells us: "No temptation has overtaken you, but such as is

common to man; but GOD is faithful, He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to endure, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." 1 Corinthians 10:13. If we will persevere in our trials and circumstances (whatever they may be), we will often realize later that the place of our greatest battles becomes the place of our greatest victories. Now reflect upon Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and then His monumental victory over death and His resurrection, you will begin to understand these temptations (life problems) and then victory. It is all part of our training here in "The School of Life".

GOD will use your greatest temptations (difficulties) or greatest sorrow to be a powerful force in your life and the lives of others. Your Valley of Baca (weeping) can become springs for you and others. You will go from strength to strength Psalm 84:6. It is in the dying that the new springs are allowed to come forth and a new strength emerges. If you find yourself in your Garden of Gethsemane (figuratively speaking), lay yourself at the feet of the only one who can sustain you. Entrust yourself to your Heavenly Father. Let Him determine your fate. It will ultimately become a place of victory.

The Holy Spirit does not have a physical body, but personality is not a physical attribute; rather, it is a combination of qualities, characteristics, and actions. The Bible says about the Holy Spirit, that He thinks, He feels 1 Corinthians 2:10, He decides 1 Corinthians 12:11, He speaks John 15:26, He teaches John 14:26, He intercedes for us Romans 8:26, He helps to make our weaknesses become empowered strengths 2 Corinthians 12:9, He also guides 1 Corinthians 2:13.

The Holy Spirit

The New Testament reveals the Holy Spirit to us as coming in person to glorify Christ in every believer as He works to create GOD's family on the earth—that is, the Church as GOD's household. He is called the Spirit of truth John 16:13 and our advocate John 14:26. When He indwells the life of the believer, He takes the truth of the words of Christ, and reveals their depth

of meaning to that individual. The Holy Spirit serves as GOD's divine administrator on earth. As the "Administrator", He desires and works to recreate in His people the life of Christ. The apostle John said in his first epistle: "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of GOD does not have life".

The Holy Spirit is the source of that life. John also says, "And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us" 1 John 3:24. What one believes about the Holy Spirit is only of value if it becomes expressed in experience; the truth of His power must step out of the Bible and into the believer's life. The work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ and make Him real in the daily life of every believer.

Grace is absolutely and totally free.

You will never be asked to pay it back. You couldn't even if you tried. Grace comes to us free and clear with no strings attached. It is the act of unmerited favor – most often to the down and out. Christ came down from heaven and he reminds us that the greatest in the kingdom is the one who serves. The ladder of power reaches up, the ladder of grace reaches down. Remember, Love that goes upward is worship; love that goes outward is affection; love that stoops is grace.

After commenting on the glory of Jesus' life, John goes on to add, "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another" (John 1:16). John and the other disciples became marked men. His style became theirs. They absorbed his tolerance, acceptance, love, warmth and compassion so that it ultimately transformed their lives. They too lived their lives demonstrating grace!

Grace is Christianity's best gift to the world. It's a force stronger than vengeance, stronger than racism, stronger than hate. Today I desire to be a person like Jesus – full of grace and truth. PRAYER: Pray that GOD would fill your life with the ability to live with the grace of our LORD Jesus.

We will be with the LORD forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

The apostle Paul affirms that believers in Jesus don't have to grieve "like the rest of mankind" 1 Thessalonians 4:13. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that GOD will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. Paul acknowledges Jesus' second coming and proclaims that all believers will be reunited with Jesus. GOD's promise of a heavenly reunion can comfort us when we're grieving the loss of a loved one who has trusted Jesus. Our promised future with our risen King also provides enduring hope when we face our own immortality, until the day Jesus comes or calls us home.

Be alert and have a sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 1 Peter 5:8-9.

Fear not. For GOD did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 2 Timothy 1:7.

GOD calls each of us to engage in spiritual warfare at times. Whenever satan wants to come against one of GOD's children, he does so by trying to intimidate through fear. Goliath's formidable size and arrogant boasting intimidated Saul and Israel's army. And because GOD's anointing had fallen from Saul, he was unable to respond with courage to Goliath's charge. Fear paralyzes and torments. That is why Saul could not respond.

The anointing had fallen on David, who was just a young boy, but mighty in spirit. David did not cower at the size or shouts of the giant Goliath. He saw Goliath through the eyes of GOD, who saw him as a mere speck. David had righteous indignation for an affront to the armies of the living GOD.

David did not weigh the risk of failure because his faith was resting totally in GOD. That is another important factor in overcoming fear, complete trust in GOD.

Do not fear sudden calamity if you are walking uprightly before GOD. It may be setting the stage for a great victory that will bring praise and honor to our heavenly Father. These battles are training grounds for greater victories to come.

So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but GOD who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 1 Corinthians 3:7-8.

Here is some food for thought.

Dear GOD, I refuse to compete with any of your other servants. They may have congregations larger than mine. I rejoice in their success. They may have greater gifts. Very well. That is not in their power nor in mine. I am humbly grateful for their greater gifts and my smaller ones. I only pray that I may use to your glory such modest gifts as I possess. I will not compare myself with any others, nor try to build up my self-esteem by noting where I may excel in Your holy work. I instead make a blanket disavowal of all of any of my natural worth. I am but an unprofitable servant. I gladly go to the foot of the class and acknowledge myself as the least of Your people. If I make a mistake in my self-judgment and actually underestimate myself I do not want to know it. I purpose to pray for others and to rejoice in their prosperity as if it were my own. And it is my own if it is Your own, for what is Yours is mine, and while one plants and another waters it is You alone that gives the increase.

Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward them for what they have done. Proverbs 19:17.

GOD's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Praise GOD from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below.

Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. Isaiah 46:4.

GOD's angelic servants are an extension of his heart. Part of the mission he has given them is to watch over and care for us because he loves us so dearly. Hebrews 1:14.

Love each other in your home. Love is patient and kind. Love does not keep a record of wrongs. Love is willing to see views other than its own. These are the ingredients that will keep the home cheerful, and the verse says a cheerful heart is good medicine. In other words, we all get sick and need these remedies. Let's practice them at home.

Is your home full of cheer? What could you do to improve the tone in your house? Do your family members respond favorably to laughter in the home? What can you do to generate more?

If grace is to be free, which is the very meaning of grace, we cannot view it as something to be repaid.

And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." But GOD said to him, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward GOD. Luke 12:19-21.

Fact: GOD will sustain my dark thorns and shining silver and gold threads. If I give all of my cares to Him He will paint the canvas of my life as He sees fit because He is The Master Artist.

Cast all your anxieties on Him, for he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7. Why should you carry the load when He asks us to give our cares to Him? We know in our hearts that He knows best. Additionally, He tells us "'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30.

Psalm 56:3 says, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in thee."

Notice: it does not say, "I never struggle with fear." Fear strikes, and the battle begins. So, the Bible does not assume that true believers will have no anxieties. Instead, the Bible tells us how to fight when they strike. My response to the person who has to deal with feelings of anxiety every day is to say: that's more or less normal. At least it is for me, ever since my teenage years. The question is: How do we fight them?

Rejoice in the LORD always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Philippians 4:4.

Rejoicing is to feel or show great joy or delight.

"For this reason, I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?" Matthew 6:25-26.

We should strive to demonstrate in our lives, meekness, modesty, humility, quietness, obedience, self-effacement, patience. These are virtues that GOD asks us to be aware of and practice.

Strive to further "The Faith". Remember, THAT IS OUR ASSIGNMENT !!

Thank You LORD GOD Almighty for obviously being there in the darkest hours before the dawn as I reflect on those things and times that I have gone through in my life.

May we always trust His name—Jesus—the name of the One that loves us. Heavenly Father, teach us who You are, so that we never have reason to doubt You in any circumstance we face.

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 1 Peter 3:8.

Hosea 6:2 includes the only Old Testament reference to being restored "on the third day." This passage, along with Jonah being in the fish's belly for three days Jonah 1:17, might have been what Paul was referring to in 1 Corinthians 15:4 when he talked about Jesus being raised on the 3rd day according to the Scriptures.

When we become callous, we can use our skills and abilities to force what we believe should happen. We take control. When we do this, we are in danger of failing to enter the Promised Land of blessing from GOD. Living in life's spiritual dimension requires patience and obedience. Beware of solving problems in your own strength. GOD wants to bring you into the Promised Land of His blessing but, it will require walking in the spiritual dimension.

Anxiety accomplishes nothing worthwhile.

"And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil, nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if GOD so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith?" Matthew 6:27-30.

Some of us freely admit "I am just a worrier and have always been a worrier". Let's face it, a worrier is nothing more than another word for a person that has habitual anxiety. Worry is just a more socially acceptable word for anxiety. Psychologist regularly see people that have what they call "anxiety disorder". This is nothing more than "worry disorder". The fact that you worry is simply the fact that you are not trusting GOD regarding any particular circumstances. The Bible gives clear instruction

about how to handle this disorder. Give it to GOD. Clearly, worrying does not solve the problem, meaning that the only possible way of properly addressing the issue is giving it to GOD. Are you a worrier? What is the medicine that helps to solve the illness? I think you know the answer but nowhere in the Holy Bible does it promise that the implementation of the solution will be easy. It just gives direction for correction. Practice, practice, practice.

Be alert and have a sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kinds of sufferings. 1 Peter 5:8-9.

But you, LORD my GOD, brought my life up from the pit. When I had sunk to the bottom of the pit my life was ebbing away. I remembered you my LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. Lo and behold You DID answer. You reached down and pulled me from the pit and set my feet on higher safe ground. I humbled myself and you were faithful to your word. May all honor and praise be yours my GOD. Thank you for your faithfulness and grace to me a sinner.

And we have hope toward GOD that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. Why? Because the Bible tells us so. Be it known, OUR HOPE IS SURE.

Do not fear the calamity that comes your way. If you are faithful to Him in the test, you will see GOD's power manifested like never before. Just as the Israelites were able to sing a song of deliverance, you too will have your own testimony of the LORD's faithfulness; and you will be able to recall it for others to build your faith and theirs.

Do not think that GOD is ignorant of your needs. He knows all of them. And he is your "heavenly Father". He does not look on,

indifferently, from a distance. He cares. He will act to supply your need when the time is best.

And so, we know and rely on the love GOD has for us. GOD is love. Whoever lives in love lives in GOD, and GOD in them. 1 John 4:16.

Taking a bad situation and making something good out of it is not uncommon for GOD. The pages of history are lined with individuals who encountered negative setbacks only to make something positive out of them. Helen Keller, born blind and deaf, faced obstacle after obstacle in her life. However, on more than one occasion she confided, "I thank GOD for my obstacles, for through them I have found myself, my work, and my GOD".

Frideric Handel was being threatened with debtors' prison and had become paralyzed on the right side of his body when he composed The Messiah, hailed as one of the greatest musical pieces in history. What the world means for evil, GOD intends for good.

My GOD shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19.

Fear not for I am with you, be not dismayed for I am your GOD, I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you, with my victorious right hand. Isaiah 41:10.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. James 3:13.

Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved. This is a promise from GOD, and He cannot lie. He is always faithful to His Word. Romans 10:13.

The Omnipresence of GOD

The active presence of GOD, both in places and in relationships, is one of the chief presuppositions running through Scripture. There is no place without GOD, no place beyond him and he is everywhere simultaneously. Ephesians 4:6. Yet GOD is not bound by, nor dependent upon, any place or anyone. GOD's universal presence encompasses all space—extending to every geographical location, creation, and all human affairs. Isaiah 40: 21-23.

Father GOD indwells his children. 1Corinthians 6:19-20. In "taking up residence," he establishes ownership, provision, love, workmanship, guidance, teaching and personal friendship. Psalm 139. Jesus reveals what GOD's presence is like. In a created universe filled with energy and wonder, GOD's passion was and is to have a relationship with every man and woman. John 1:1-18. GOD does not come and go in our lives—rather, we live and move and have our being in him. Acts 17:27-28.

No one will take your joy from you because your joy comes from being with Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus means that you will never die; you will never be cut off from him.

You see, two things have to be true if your joy is never to be taken from you. One is that the source of your joy lasts forever and the other is that you last forever. If either you or the source of your joy is mortal, your joy will be taken from you.

And how many people have settled for just that! Eat, drink, and be merry they say, for tomorrow we die, and that's that. Food doesn't last forever, and I don't last forever. So, let's make the most of it while we can. What a tragedy!

If you are tempted to think that way right now, please consider as seriously as you possibly can that if your joy were in being with Jesus, "No one would take your joy from you"—not in this life, nor in the life to come.

Not life or death, or angels or principalities, or things present or things to come, or powers or height or depth, or anything else in all creation will be able to take our joy from us in Jesus Christ. Romans 8:38-39.

Joy in being with Jesus is an unbroken line from now to eternity. It will not be cut off by his death or ours.

Over the years the great leaders who went on to turn thousands to Christ had to begin with GOD and their own soul. The plain Christian of today must experience personal revival before he can hope to bring renewed spiritual life to his church.

The principle that we may disobey the state if it forbids what GOD commands or commands what He forbids is easy to learn, but difficult to apply. The state will sometimes engage in unfair practices that we must follow because we cannot make the case that such practices violate Scripture. For example, the so-called "progressive" taxation that exists presently in the United States may be unjust, but we have no right to refuse to pay taxes. Romans 13:7. Our default position as Christians is to bend over backward to be model citizens. But when the demands of GOD's kingdom directly contradict the demands of the kingdom of men, the mandates of our heavenly citizenship must win.

Jesus calls us to show sacrificial love, especially for those we consider friends. Pray that this depth of love will become a reality in the church of Jesus Christ and in your life.

One day, all the people of heaven will sing together in a magnificent choir proclaiming the majesty of Jesus and the blessing of His forever reign. Until then, we live, work, pray, and wait in hope.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. Ephesians 1:18. Please open the eyes of my heart LORD in Jesus' Name, amen.

Dear GOD, make us aware of the people around us who need our help. Give us the strength and wisdom to comfort those who are hurting.

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. Psalm 27:4.

In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16:11. Delight yourself in the LORD. Psalm 37:4.

Let any man turn to GOD in earnest, let him begin to exercise himself unto GODliness, let him seek to develop his powers of spiritual receptivity by trust and obedience and humility, and the results will exceed anything he may have hoped in his leaner and weaker days.

Today I will live in the realization that people are more important than things. Help me, LORD, to not be tied down by my possessions but be open to sharing what You have given me with others in need.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in GOD, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

He drew me out of deep waters on many occasions. Psalm 18:16.

I will personally testify to you dear reader, that He has always been there for me. Whenever I needed Him most, He was there. His faithfulness and mercy are beyond description.

I love you, LORD, you are my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer. My GOD is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I called to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I have been saved from my enemies. Psalm 18: 1-3.

He reached down from on high and took hold of me; He drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me. Psalm 18:16-19.

Strong, saving, rescuing GOD, in the midst of my distress, when life's waters are raging, grant me the faith to see You and cleave to You in every storm.

Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD GOD Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.

GOD loves us and wants us to have a right relationship with Him. He also desires that we have a right relationship with one another, and thus enjoy GOD's best for us.
Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. John 8:31–32.

To be fully free, we must have the desire, the ability, and the opportunity to do what will make us happy forever. No regrets. And only Jesus, the Son of GOD who died and rose for us, can make that possible. If the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed.

If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Luke 6:29.
Christlike retaliation. When someone curses you, you don't just accept it. You retaliate by blessing him. When someone mistreats and persecutes you, you don't just accept it. You retaliate by praying for him. When someone takes your cloak you retaliate by giving your undercoat. When someone slaps you in the face, don't stand for it. Retaliate! Turn your other cheek.

May the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ, and the love of GOD, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
2 Corinthians 13:14.

Do you or I have a problem that seems to be a continually unresolved issue? Have you asked GOD to tell you the reason for the problem? It may have a spiritual root that is still unresolved with GOD. He may be allowing this pressure to bring attention to an issue He wants you to take care of. Ask the LORD today to give you revelation on your problem. As a loving Father, He desires to make known anything that stands in the way of fellowship between you and Him. However, His righteousness must always be upheld.
Psychologists teach that the way people think affects their emotions, their ability to relate to others and their ability to cope in difficult circumstances. They maintain that positive thinking increases happiness and success in life. Christians are to be positive thinkers Philippians 4:11,13. However, the Bible teaches that this trait is not gained through mere personal effort. Rather, it is a byproduct of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Believers are to meditate on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable Philippians 4:8. Their minds are to be filled with virtuous and praiseworthy thoughts. Those whose hearts have not been changed by GOD's Spirit will find that ultimately they are powerless to combat the evil in their minds, for the condition of their hearts determines the condition of their thoughts Matthew 15:19, and unGODly thoughts will inevitably manifest themselves in unGODly speech and action. Jude 1:15-16. The power of the Holy Spirit enables the Christian to make every thought obedient to Christ see 2 Corinthians 10:5 and truly think, speak and act positively.

In Jesus Christ we who are born of GOD have the unspeakable privilege of knowing Yahweh as our Father. He is, "I AM WHO I AM". The GOD who exists. Whose personality and power is owing solely to himself. Who never changes. From whom all power and energy in the universe flows and to whom all creation should conform its life.

May those who know the name of GOD put their trust in him forever.

Today I will walk in faith thankful that I do not have to be perfect to do GOD's will. Thank You, LORD, that You can still use me with all my imperfections and blind spots.

When we make reckless decisions, we pay the consequences. "Desire without knowledge is not good—how much more will hasty feet miss the way!" Proverbs 19:2. May we prayerfully, carefully seek GOD's wisdom and guidance in the choices and decisions we make today.

Jesus, please help me to follow Your wise instruction as Your Spirit leads me.

Beloved, we are now children of GOD, and what we will be, has not yet been revealed. We know that when Christ appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as Christ is pure. Everyone who practices sin practices lawlessness as well. Indeed, sin is lawlessness.

Each of us, had to learn the difference between "good things" and "GOD-things." Are you involved in anything in which GOD has not directed you to be involved? Do you seek GOD about every decision, every action before you take it? This is where GOD wants you and me to be. Ask Him to show you how to walk with Him in this way.

When Moses asks GOD's name so he can tell it to the Israelites, GOD replies, "I am who I am." Exodus 3:14. The Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the Hebrew OT) translates it as "I am the Existing One." But the Hebrew may also be translated "I will be what/who I will be". Jewish tradition always substitutes the Hebrew Adonai (LORD) for the sacred name. Of course, GOD is to be thought of as far more than any name mere humans may use when referring to him. Indeed, He is GOD ALMIGHTY ! (He always has been and always will be).

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust

destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. Matthew 6:19–20.

Here is something we all should consider. Devoting a life to material comforts and thrills is like throwing money down a rat hole. But investing a life in the labor of love yields dividends of joy unsurpassed and unending:

"Sell your possessions and give to the needy. [And thus] provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail." Luke 12:33.

This message is very good news: Come to Christ, in whose presence are fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. Join us in the labor of Christian Hedonism. For the LORD has spoken: It is more blessed to love than to live in luxury!

Every church should strive for unity among its members, not languidly, but earnestly and optimistically. Every pastor should show his people the possibilities of the Holy Spirit power that lie in this fusion of many souls into one. Think Revival !

Precious LORD, give us unity in our church's today. We have seen what devastation of disunity can bring. Give us a oneness of mind and heart that we might experience Your full blessing in our midst. Amen.

Matthew 22:34-40 says "You shall love the LORD your GOD with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Now a personal note from my own life experiences if I may.

I worked in one particular industry for 30 years. An industry that demands extremely strong precautions relevant to public safety. One of the things emphasized in all of our continuous training was the use of the words "should", "may" "shall". This was in regard to the importance of the work being performed (indicated

in our many work procedures). Procedures were used to direct the manner in which any work activities were to be performed. The word "SHALL" by definition leaves no room for individual interpretation. Any work being performed SHALL be done exactly as indicated in the procedure if the word shall was used in those directions.

Now please notice in Matthew 22:34-40 the use of the word SHALL. Don't make the mistake of assuming that this means "should" or "may". NO, the word used is definitely SHALL. Let's apply this principle from the Holy Bible when it comes to loving GOD and our neighbor's. Thank you for indulging me as I shared these personal thoughts on the subject with you.

The commandment to love is an Order to do something; thus, we are to love others, serving them even if we do not feel like it. Furthermore, if love for GOD and neighbor are the commandments upon which the Law and Prophets hang, we cannot somehow separate love from these stipulations and define love in a way that ignores GOD's law. Any act the Bible forbids is not love; rather, the Law shows us how to express true love. Paul the Apostle can say, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." Romans 13:10 and also expect Christians to live out the basic ethical code of the Old Testament. Above all, John Calvin (a French theologian, pastor and reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation) commented that Jesus said that "love is the first and great thing that GOD demands from us, and therefore the first and great thing that we should devote to him."

GOD does not rest satisfied with the outward appearance of works, but chiefly demands the inward feelings, that from a good root, good fruits may grow. Additionally, John Calvin said that Love is not primarily a feeling, but Jesus certainly wants feeling and action to agree. We must act in a loving way even if the feeling is not present, but to feel love while acting is even better. Pray that your actions will always be a result of the love you possess.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to GOD with gratitude in your hearts. Colossians 3:16.

Singing is a ministry of encouragement. Think about it. The words and tune encourages others, encourages us and above all Honors and worships GOD. Sing every chance you get. It is for your own good and the good of others. Sing to your spirit.

A song lifts the spirit like nothing else. And as I read the Bible, I saw how central singing was to the practice of faith. The Israelites sing all the time in the temple; prisoners Paul and Silas sing in the cell; the early house churches sing to each other, and the scriptures climax in the great throne visions of John in Revelation, and what is going on in that most hallowed place but the singing of a "new song".

Birds sing ! GOD made billions of birds. He also made them to sing. What a concept ! When you hear birds singing, don't take it for granted. I believe they sing for a couple of reasons. Communication and joy. There may be more reasons that I am not aware of but these two come to mind when I think about birds singing. Did GOD make them to sing praises to Him? I think so.

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. John 7:37.

Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. GOD's refreshing Spirit revives us today when we're life weary. He's the Living Water, dwelling in our souls with holy refreshment. May we drink deeply today.

What areas of your life feel parched and dry? What may be preventing you from asking Jesus to give you this living water? Dear Precious Loving GOD, when life leaves me road-weary and thirsty, thank You for the gift of Your Spirit, the living water, who dwells in every believer.

He has delivered us from such deadly perils and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us. He is faithful and true always.

The GOD of the universe doesn't need to let his creation in on what he's doing and why but GOD doesn't view his relationship with us that way. GOD wants everyone to see his good heart.

Jesus uses Jonah's three-day fish belly experience to illustrate his upcoming situation of spending "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" in explanation of his death and resurrection. Matthew 12:40.

Seek ye first the kingdom of GOD and His righteousness, and all of these things will be given unto you. Matthew 6:33. In other words, if we seek GOD first in all things in our lives then everything else will be taken care of. GOD cannot lie. Learning to trust GOD is a lifelong process. Apply yourself to it.

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9.

When we are anxious about decisions we have to make about the future, we should battle unbelief with this promise, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you." Psalm 32:8.

If GOD is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31.

When we are anxious about the welfare of those we love, we should battle unbelief with this promise: "That if I, being evil, know how to give good things to my children, how much more will the Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask him!" Matthew 7:11.

We should fight to maintain our spiritual equilibrium with the reminder that "everyone who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for Christ's sake

shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life." Mark 10:29–30.

Tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of GOD has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:3–5.

Sometimes you may hear people pray "Oh LORD, send the Holy Spirit that we may become a united people." That is all right except it is precisely backwards. The Holy Spirit comes because we are a united people; He does not come to make us a united people. Our prayer should be more like, "LORD, help us to get united in order that the blessing might flow and there might be an outpouring of your oil and dew and life." That's the way we should pray. This teaches us that unity is necessary to the outpouring of the Spirit of GOD.

The LORD who is worthy of our devotion is not like the Islamic GOD, who is unable to enter creation because he is only transcendent. Instead, Yahweh, the creator GOD and covenant LORD of Israel, became incarnate and entered human history two thousand years ago to bring redemption to His people. John1:14.

Jesus is no mere man; He is the resurrected LORD of the universe. Let us unwaveringly hold fast to this confession of faith, which alone can save us.

What a friend we have in Jesus! May we be that kind of friend to others.

The Apostle Paul said: "We glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance produces character; and then character, hope." Romans 5: 3-4.

The original name of the State (country) of GOD's people was originally called Israel. However, there was an eventual split becoming "The Northern and The Southern". The Northern was then called simply "Israel" and the Southern became "Judah". The capital of the Northern was Samaria and the capital of the Southern was Jerusalem. What a tragedy for GOD's people to come to this dividing circumstance. But the Bible says that the time will come when He will gather the remnants together like sheep into one pasture (i.e., as one people). He, their King, will break through the gate before them and let them run free in the pasture. Micah 2:12-13. Micah isn't just speaking about GOD rescuing his people from foreign captors. He's speaking of GOD rescuing his people from this dark world and breaking through into GOD's kingdom where he will set them free forever.

Sometimes there are discrepancies in our perception of reality. We look at our situations and conclude based on the circumstances that reality must be this way. But GOD says, "No, you do not see what I see or know what I am doing. The situation is very different than what you are perceiving."

Be careful not to draw conclusions about your situation that may not be based on truth. GOD always has a plan for His servants that we may not know about. Ask GOD to give you His perception of the situation, not yours.

The steadfast love of the LORD is better than life itself. Psalm 63:3.

GOD's wisdom is personal and available only through a personal relationship with the LORD Himself. What are you doing to develop your relationship with Jesus as well as your wisdom?

And GOD placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Ephesians 1:22-23.

In Saudi Arabia, we find a country that has not had an official church in over fourteen hundred years. And yet many believers meet together secretly and at great risk all over the country. Do not take your church for granted. Many people the world over would love to have what you have in your local church. Please remember to pray for those around the world who must meet in secret for worship services.

Prayer, in regard to Jesus' teachings can be quiet and submissive and is an expression of trust, devoid of pride and pretense. It need not be loud or boisterous. It is certainly acceptable to pray aloud either in private or public but quiet submissive prayer can be so personal and precious.

In the LORD's Prayer, Jesus is realistic about evil. It exists not only between us, requiring forgiveness Matthew 6:12, but on a grand scale, requiring deliverance. This realism, however, is matched with hope. There's a place where evil doesn't exist, heaven and that heavenly kingdom is coming to earth. One day GOD's justice will be complete. His "moral ending" will come, and evil will be banished for good. Revelation 21:4.

In regard to lost hope. When you say someone has lost hope, it paints a dire and dismal picture. When hope dies that is when the heart fails. GOD invites you to become a prisoner of hope rather than of "lost hope". Do not believe that life is over. GOD reminds you of His covenant to love and care for you. Zechariah 9:12.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. John: 2:1.

Jesus provides life for people without hope. All who call on him and believe in his name will be saved. Romans 10:13. Jesus is also referred to as a rock that makes people stumble 1 Peter 2:8. Even today his uncompromising call to repentance causes some people to reject him because they love sin and the stuff of earth. Jesus' clear message of salvation through his name alone

is too much for many people to accept—they refuse to put faith in him as the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus, I am vulnerable, but you are not. You are my rock, and I pray that by depending fully on you for protection and provision, I may lead others to do the same. Amen.

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have supremacy. Colossians 1:18.

The new birth is a spiritual experience that opens the heart to the Spirit of GOD. He enters that heart and dwells there. This believer is then a "priest" of GOD and enjoys direct access into the holy presence of GOD. 1 Peter 2:5, 9 and Hebrews 4:16. This relationship of an individual with Christ is clearly a spiritual relationship, and Jesus joins together individuals who have this faith in Him into a spiritual body—His church.

In the Bible, the church is called "GOD's husbandry", "the body of Christ," and the "household of Christ." It is also called "His bride and a wife." He is the head of the body. We are the body. The actual body of The LORD GOD Almighty. What an honor and blessing.

Here for us is THE question of the ages! What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Mark 8:36.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels. Mark 8:34-38.

We're often tempted to pursue things that seem of great value, yet they distract us from following Jesus. Let's ask GOD to

guide us in the choices we face each day so we'll choose wisely and honor Him.

Dear Holy and precious LORD Jesus, I want to walk with You. Please help me to recognize and choose the paths that will foster a deeper connection to you.

Jesus took the punishment for our sins on himself. All we need to do is believe in Him and ask for forgiveness that we all know deep inside that we need. We know we have been sinful. He took the punishment that we deserve because He wants to have a loving relationship with us.

Ask GOD to do extraordinary things in your life. Begin today to trust Him to accomplish great things for His Kingdom through you.

Being a servant to others teaches us to be more like Christ and in him we find the joy of servitude.

The Word of GOD is no small matter; it is a matter of life and death. If you treat the Scriptures as a trifle or as empty words, you forfeit life.

Even our physical life depends on GOD's Word, because by his Word we were created Psalm 33:6; Hebrews 11:3 and "He upholds the universe by the word of his power". Hebrews 1:3

Our spiritual life begins by the Word of GOD: "By His own will he brought us forth by the word of truth." James 1:18. You have been born again through the living and abiding word of GOD. 1 Peter 1:23.

Not only do we begin to live by GOD's Word, but we also go on living by GOD's Word: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of GOD." Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3.

Our physical life is created and upheld by the Word of GOD, and our spiritual life is quickened and sustained by the Word of GOD.

How many stories could be gathered to bear witness to the life-giving power of the Word of GOD!

Indeed, the Bible is "no empty word for you" — it is your life! The foundation of all joy is life. Nothing is more fundamental than sheer existence — our creation and our preservation.

All this is owing to the Word of GOD's power. By that same power, he has spoken in Scripture for the creation and sustenance of our spiritual life. Therefore, the Bible is no empty word, but is your very life — the kindling of your joy!

Today I will not just think about myself, but function as a vital member of the body of Jesus.

Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." John 11:43-44.

Heavenly Father, sometimes I take for granted how You've transformed my life. Thank You for never giving up on me.

GOD's forgiveness is great for those who choose to accept it. The Ninevites (an enemy of Israel) had rejected it and chosen evil. Evil won't stand before GOD. So, GOD wiped them out. And the world cheered.

LORD, who may dwell in Your sanctuary? Who may live on Your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart." Psalm 15:1-2.

LIVE CONFIDENT IN GOD'S POWER. The immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. Ephesians 1:19.

Is there anything more freeing, more thrilling, or more strengthening than the truth that GOD Almighty is your refuge — all day, every day in all the ordinary and extraordinary experiences of life?

If we believed this, if we really let this truth of GOD's omnipotence get hold of us, what a difference it would make in our personal lives and in our ministries! How humble and powerful we would become for the saving purposes of GOD!

The omnipotence of GOD means refuge for the people of GOD. And when you really believe that your refuge is the omnipotence of GOD Almighty, there is a joy and a freedom and a power that spills over in a life of radical obedience to Jesus Christ.

By this we know that we love the children of GOD, when we love GOD and keep his commandments. For this is the love of GOD, that we keep His commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. 1 John 5:2-3.

"The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Matthew 23: 5-12.

With good reason, pride is often considered the sin that births all other evils. Adam and Eve refused to submit humbly to the LORD's command not to eat the forbidden fruit. The prouder we are, the harder it is to repent, because we will not want others to see us as more sinful than we have let on.

GOD demands humility from His people, not pride. Christ, not the Pharisees, is our model, and His humble way is the only path to exaltation.

But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive by faith the righteousness GOD has promised to us. Galatians 5:5.

Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Psalm 90:14.

In Psalm 90, we're invited to see our lives not just in the present, but as a whole—to ask GOD to help us "number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom". Remembering that our time on earth is limited can remind us of our desperate need to rely on GOD. We need His help to learn how to find satisfaction and

joy—not just now, but "all our days". We need His help to learn to think not just of ourselves, but of future generations. And we need His help to serve Him with the time we've been given as He establishes the work of our hands and hearts.

Dear GOD, thank You for the gift of life. Help me to cherish it with the time I've been given. Thank You that when my walk with You on earth is over, I can look forward to an eternity of fellowship with You.

The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of GOD but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:14.

Even if life isn't always good, GOD is good all the time. The New Testament quotes this truth often. Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11 reinforces the fact that our salvation comes through trusting in GOD's gift of righteousness to us—not through any righteousness we earn on our own.

Jesus says, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:32. The freedom he has in mind is freedom from the slavery of sin or to put it positively, it is freedom for holiness.

The promises of GOD's grace provide the power that makes the demands of GOD's holiness an experience of freedom rather than fear. Peter described the freeing power of GOD's promises like this: "Through his precious and very great promises you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire." 2 Peter 1:4. In other words, when we trust the promises of GOD, we sever the root of corruption by the power of a superior promise.

How crucial is the Word that breaks the power of counterfeit pleasures and how vigilant we should be to light our paths and load our hearts with the Word of GOD!

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:105. "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." Psalm 119:10.

Theological facts are like the altar of Elijah on Mount Carmel before the fire came, correct, properly laid out, but altogether cold. When the heart makes the ultimate surrender, the fire falls and true facts are transmuted into spiritual truth that transforms, enlightens, sanctifies. The church or the individual that is Bible taught without being Spirit taught (and there are many of them) has simply failed to see that truth lies deeper than the theological statement of it.

Please remember to pray today for those believers still living in North Korea and committed to evangelism. Their assignment from GOD comes with great dangers. (Think arrest, imprisonment and extreme/severe punishment if caught).

Prayer can only take a few minutes but the resulting benefits can last a lifetime. Pray every time you feel the prompting of the Precious Holy Spirit. "Prayer is of course, time well spent".

Now let's look at Matthew 15:17-20 as follows:

17 "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?

18 But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them.

19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

20 These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.

Watch your heart's attitude. Watch your mouth!

So, in teaching His disciples about what makes a person clean and unclean, Jesus said it isn't dirty hands or "whatever enters the mouth" that defiles a person, but an evil heart. The stench from our hearts will eventually leak out from our lives. Then

Jesus gave examples of evil thoughts and actions that come "out of the heart" as mentioned previously here. No amount of external religious activities and rituals can make them clean. We need GOD to transform our hearts.

We can practice Jesus' inside-out ethic by giving Him access to the squalor of our hearts and letting Him remove what's causing the stench. As Christ uncovers what's coming from our hearts, He'll help our words and actions be aligned with His desires, and the aroma from our lives will please Him.

In the first of the Ten Commandments, GOD commanded the Israelites to serve him exclusively because he was worthy of their trust, as he had proved by delivering them from Egypt. Later, just before Moses died and the Israelites entered the promised land, GOD inspired Moses to remind the people of their single-minded calling. GOD's people needed to submit fully to his authority and believe he could provide all they needed. It's this kind of trust that Jesus calls us to demonstrate as his disciples. Unfortunately, Jesus' disciple Peter had a bit more trouble retaining his single-minded focus when he was met with distraction. Peter's experience is a good reminder of how we are to think about Jesus, and keep our eyes on him, even when our thoughts get sidetracked or we feel frightened. Matthew 14:22-36.

The GOD of all things doesn't make light of our pain, nor does he stand outside of it as an observer. He recognizes our pain, feels our pain and stands with us in our pain. He, more than anyone, knows how deep the losses of this world are and he lovingly stands in the pain with us—until one day neither he nor we will cry another tear.

Please allow me to share something with you of a very personal nature that demonstrates the faithfulness of GOD relevant to Matthew 6:33. Yesterday I was informed by phone of an unexpected change in my finances. This meant that I would be facing some cutbacks in the next couple of months to address the situation. This brought a bit of a problem to light that I would have to address. Specifically, I had to ask myself if I

would continue to tithe in the coming months as I was accustomed to doing. I decided that my first obligation was faithfulness to GOD regarding the tithe. I went ahead and tithed in accordance with the reduced income amount while maintaining my prescribed standard. Yes, it was a matter of faithfulness and a moral issue between me and my Dear LORD. The very next morning I encountered a lovely gentleman that I was conducting a small business deal with. It had been planned in advance of the present circumstance that I found myself in. He suddenly said, "I am going to gift this to you free of charge because I feel that is what I am supposed to do". Long story short, it blew my mind. In summary, I was faithful to my LORD and in return I saw firsthand His faithfulness to me (His servant). This is a true story, do with it what you will. I share this out of gratitude to GOD and I hope it is somehow and, in some way beneficial to you. Firsthand accounts of occurrences between GOD and servant are of great importance to our spiritual growth and development of our TRUST in OUR LORD. Trust is something that is developed during a lifetime of service. Wouldn't you agree?

But if GOD so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Matthew 6:30.

Jesus says that the root of anxiety is inadequate faith in our Father's future grace.

One reaction to this might be: "This is not good news! In fact, it is very discouraging to learn that what I thought was a mere struggle with an anxious disposition is rather a far deeper struggle with whether I trust GOD."

My response to this is to agree, but then to disagree.

Suppose you had been having pain in your stomach and had been struggling with medicines and diets of all kinds, to no avail. And then suppose that your doctor tells you, after a routine visit, that you have cancer in your small intestine. Would that be good news? You say, emphatically not! And I agree.

But let me ask the question another way: Are you glad the doctor discovered the cancer while it is still treatable, and that indeed it can be very successfully treated? You say, yes, I am very glad that the doctor found the real problem. Again, I agree.

So, the news that you have cancer is not good news. But, in another sense, it is good news, because knowing what is really wrong is good, especially when your problem can be treated successfully.

That's what it's like to learn that the real problem behind anxiety is unbelief in the promises of GOD's future grace. And he is able to work in wonderfully healing ways when we cry out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" Mark 9:24.

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:10.

We go into strict training to get a crown that will last forever. 1 Corinthians 9:25.

The Need for Self-Discipline

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. 1 Corinthians 9:24–27.

We don't train to earn salvation. Rather, just the opposite: as we realize how truly wondrous our salvation is, it reshapes our priorities, our perspective, and the very things we live for as each of us faithfully runs our own race of faith in GOD's strength. Moment by moment and day by day. It may be considered "lifelong training of our spirit".

Dear Almighty Father, help us to grow in our spiritual discipline as a response to Your love and not as an attempt to earn something You've already given us.

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. 2 Timothy 4:2.

He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. Ephesians 1:9-10.

Jesus told His disciples that since he is leaving them, he will send them an Advocate—the Holy Spirit—who will be in them to walk with them through life. The Spirit will teach them about GOD and speak GOD's words. Jesus instructs his disciples to stay engaged with him, like branches stay connected to their vines. They won't be able to do anything apart from him.

"This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true GOD, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent".

The eternal life that Jesus offers begins in the here and now, in knowing and loving GOD. And it will never end. John 17:3.

"Therefore, My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father".

John 10:17,18.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? Hebrews 2:3.

Is there a sense of greatness in your mind about your salvation? Or do you neglect it?

Do you respond to the greatness of your salvation? Or do you treat it the way you treat your will or the title to your car or the deed on your house? You signed it once and it is in a file drawer somewhere, but it is not a really great thing. It has no daily effect on you. Basically, you neglect it.

But what is it really, this great salvation? What he's really saying is:

Don't neglect being loved by GOD.
Don't neglect being forgiven, accepted, protected, strengthened and guided by Almighty GOD.
Don't neglect the sacrifice of Christ's life on the cross.
Don't neglect the free gift of righteousness imputed by faith.
Don't neglect the removal of GOD's wrath and the reconciled smile of GOD.
Don't neglect the indwelling Holy Spirit and the fellowship and friendship of the living Christ.
Don't neglect the radiance of GOD's glory in the face of Jesus.

This is a great salvation. Neglecting it is very evil. Don't neglect so great a salvation. Because if you do, you will perish without escape.

So being a Christian is a very serious business — not a sour business, but a serious business. We are simply blood-earnest about being happy in our great salvation.

We will not be deflected by this world into the fleeting and suicidal pleasures of sin. We will not neglect our eternal joy in GOD — which is what salvation is. We will gouge out our eyes rather than be lured away from eternal life.

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. Galatians 5:17. The spiritual battle that we experience daily is a continual occurrence that we must go through to maturity in Jesus Christ.

We need to realize that we must constantly have total dependence on our LORD for spiritual victory regarding the battle that rages within us (the flesh vs. the Spirit). Please grant us that victory daily, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Today I too will pray for patience and strength to be a witness even to my enemies.

Father, I confess my sin and the judgment I deserve and cling to Your promise to forgive and restore. Thank you for your mercy and loving kindness. I pray in Jesus' Holy name. Amen

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all GODliness and holiness. 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

Every day we have the opportunity to follow The one true GOD. Every day, he invites us to know and worship him. His arms are open wide. Dear LORD, I choose you as my one and only, true GOD. Please, show me what is evil, and teach me how I can better follow you. I want to have faith only in you and your power. Amen.

By this we know that we love the children of GOD, when we love GOD and obey his commandments. For this is the love of GOD, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of GOD overcomes the world. 1 John 5:2–4.

The evidence of the genuineness of our love for the children of GOD is said to be the love of GOD. What does this teach us about our love for the children of GOD?

Since love for GOD is doing his will gladly rather than with a sense of burden, and since love for GOD is the measure of the genuineness of our love for the children of GOD, therefore our love for the children of GOD must also be done gladly rather than begrudgingly.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Romans 12:14.

Jesus wants us to not repay evil with evil but rather love, bless and pray for those who are our enemies.

Please, help us LORD to live among those who oppose us with the character of Jesus and respond to them with love and not hate.

But the day of the LORD will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and GODly lives. 2 Peter 3:10-11.

Some of the Corinthian believers were struggling with the idea of resurrection, and GOD wanted them to understand how crucial Jesus' resurrection is.

GOD's message, the one Paul proclaims, is this: Jesus died for our sins and then was raised from the dead on the third day—just like the Old Testament said he would be. Hundreds of believers saw him and testified to the fact. Jesus' resurrection is the fulfillment of GOD's story, our story. Just as Jesus rose to life in his body, he is going to resurrect believers too.

If resurrection from the dead isn't possible, as some in the Corinthian church were claiming, then everything falls apart. If Jesus didn't rise to life, conquering death, then he would have no authority to conquer sin and raise us to life either. He would have no authority to fix what's broken in us and what's broken in the world. And we would have no hope.

But Jesus did rise from the dead. And He did conquer sin and death. And He will set everything right because he reigns as King. He will change our bodies into deathless ones, homes of his Spirit. Death's sting will be gone.

Paul signs off his letter with a few more instructions for the Corinthian believers and blesses them with his love and with the grace of the LORD Jesus.

Easter Sunday morning, Jesus' dead heart started beating again; his stilled cells sprang back to life. And nothing would ever be the same.

Jesus took on all of the world's sin, accepted death as the punishment and rose back to life. He paid for sin; and then, through his resurrection, he broke the power of the consequence of sin which is death. Romans 6:23. Jesus paid the penalty that we deserve and then destroyed its authority altogether.

It was a foretaste of what is to come. Jesus' death-rising was the first step in GOD's process of fixing everything in the world that is broken. At the resurrection, good conquered evil. Beauty defeated brokenness. Jesus' defeat of sin and death was the beginning of the end for the kingdom of darkness and all of the ugliness in the world. The resurrection isn't just a historical event; it is history's turning point. Evil and pain are on a timer. One day GOD will end it all.

Paul says that he was "abnormally born." Corinthians 15:8. He didn't walk with Jesus like the other apostles had. And his birth into Christianity was blindingly (literally) different from that of the other apostles. Acts 9:3-9.

What place should money take in our lives?

For some people, money is central. They worship wealth, which means that they devote most of their time, energy and attention to its gain and use because they regard it as the key to power and prestige. Oh, I'd never worship the idol of affluence you may say. But ask yourself these questions:

How much time do I spend every day thinking about my financial life—my income, my bills, my past and upcoming purchases and my investments? In comparison, how much time do I spend meditating upon GOD's Word?

How much time do I spend every week working, shopping or dealing with money? Be sure to include trips to automatic teller machines and the bank, discussions with your spouse about

budgets or spending plans and habits, and the time you spend paying bills and balancing your checking account. In comparison, how much time do I spend seeking GOD in prayer and Bible reading, or serving the LORD in church-related activities and outreach?

How am I more likely to discuss with my family and friends a hot stock tip, the cost of an item and a new business opportunity—or an insight I have into GOD's Word, the truths I gleaned from last Sunday's sermon and the way in which the Holy Spirit has helped me during the day? Which topic is more likely to attract a greater amount of my energy, enthusiasm or concern—more wealth or a deeper understanding of the SAVIOR? You may say that you trust GOD in every area of your life—but do you ever conduct business transactions, make purchases and investments and enter into money-making opportunities without asking his opinion or seeking his wisdom? When you leave the LORD out of your financial life, you are in grave danger of making money your idol. So how can you make sure you don't fall into such a deadly trap? You could begin by focusing on Philippians 4:19, where GOD promises to supply all your needs. All of us have very specific needs: emotional, physical, material, mental and spiritual. GOD knows that our needs must be met if we are to carry out the complete life plan he has ordained for us in Matthew 6:32. By making intimacy with GOD your number one priority in life, you can be assured that he will meet all those needs.

Remember, Jesus said it like this: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you." Matthew 6:33.

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to GOD, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living GOD? Hebrews 9:14.

Here we are in the modern age — the age of the Internet, smart phones, space travel, and heart transplants — and our problem is fundamentally the same as always: our consciences condemn

us and make us feel unacceptable to GOD. We are alienated from GOD.

We can beat ourselves up, throw our children in the sacred river, give a million dollars to charity, or serve in a soup kitchen, or a hundred forms of penance and self-injury, and the result will be the same: the stain remains and death terrifies.

We know that our conscience is defiled — not with external things like touching a corpse, a dirty diaper, or a piece of pork. Jesus said it is what comes out of a man that defiles, not what goes in. Mark 7:15-23. We are defiled by attitudes like pride and self-pity and bitterness and lust and envy, jealousy, covetousness, apathy and fear.

The only answer in this modern age, as in every other age is the blood of Christ. When your conscience rises up and condemns you, where will you turn? Hebrews 9:14 gives you the answer: TURN TO JESUS CHRIST. He is the way, the truth and the life.

Turn to the blood of Christ. Turn to the only cleansing agent in the universe that can give you relief in life and peace in death.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

What a relief to find the writer to the Hebrews encouraging us to "draw near to GOD with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience." Hebrews 10:22.

A sprinkled conscience, surely this is a gracious thing for men and women in the world to know!

One of the most relieving, enriching, wholesome, wondrous things we can know is that sudden sense of the lifting of the burden as the conscience goes free-GOD giving freedom to that conscience which has been evil, diseased and protesting.

Peter wrote about this and called it "the pledge of a good conscience toward GOD. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 3:21.

This is the kind of conversion I believe in-when your sins are cleansed and forgiven through the blood of the Lamb, you will know it!...

A transaction has taken place within the human spirit. The heart suddenly knows itself clean and the burden lifts from the mind and there is a true sense that heaven is pleased and GOD is smiling and the sins are gone.

A transaction within the human spirit. That is the kind of forgiveness I believe in!

Luke 4:16-30 says "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me…to proclaim good news to the poor. …to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor".

Even those who have not formally studied the doctrine of Christ have constructed some kind of Christology. Many Americans think Jesus came to give them a "better life" in the here and now and to help them make friends and win influence. Others say Jesus would join movements to protect and conserve the earth's resources or engage in other "environmentally-friendly" practices. Innumerable people understand Jesus to be the supreme ethical teacher who is concerned with accepting all into His kingdom even if they never repent of sin.

Friendship, the stewardship of creation, and the love of others are all praised in Scripture, Gen. 1:28; Prov. 17:17; 1 John 3:16. However, reducing the purpose and teaching of our LORD to any of these things ends up domesticating Him. A domesticated Jesus embraces the culture's values without challenging them; He is a "safe" Jesus who is no threat to the established way of doing things.

Yet Christ did not come into the world to be "nice" or "safe," and the Jesus we find in the Gospels cannot be domesticated. He brings a salvation that turns our values upside-down. Instead of the proud and arrogant, He exalts those of humble estate. Luke 1:52. Christ's coming produces peace among His people, but it also sets the fallen world against His own. The scandal of the cross brings with it the promise of a final, cosmic redemption that will include all who believe. At the same time, it becomes a stumbling block to unrepentant Jews and foolishness to hardened Gentiles. 1 Cor. 1:18–31.

Though we know these truths, we also run the risk of trying to domesticate Jesus, although in a different way. Often we limit His work to giving us a clean heart so that we may live forever in

heaven. Certainly, our SAVIOR is concerned with individual redemption, and only individuals who put their faith in Christ alone will be saved but, individual redemption is only part of His intent to redeem all creation. Our LORD's full purpose is to bring a new heavens and earth in which we will dwell with Him forever. Isa. 65:17–25; 2 Peter 3:13. A Christology that does not consider the reality of future, resurrected life and the renewal of all things is one that is severely lacking.

The Christian faith does not believe in an ethereal kind of salvation that only encompasses a world we cannot see. Instead, because GOD created everything good and because He purposes to redeem His creation. We know that the final redemption He brings will encompass all things. We are therefore concerned to be good stewards of the earth. Not because we worship nature, but because they are gifts of GOD that will one day be restored to their fullness.

Jesus Christ ordained five functions for His church to be involved in for Him. We are to evangelize Matthew 28:19; to disciple or train those who are evangelized; Matthew 28:20 to minister or serve people demonstrating GOD's love; Matthew 22:39; Ephesians 4:12; to fellowship together Ephesians 2:19, Galatians 6:10; and to worship together Matthew 4:10; also John 4:23. In the Bible, there is not necessarily a priority order for these five purposes. They are all equally important.

Evangelism is one primary function. If we really have come to know Christ as LORD and SAVIOR, we will want to share this wonderful experience with those we love. It sometimes seems hard or embarrassing to share the Gospel with our friends and relatives. But, if we really love them, and if we really believe that without Christ they will suffer for eternity separated from GOD, we will tell them no matter how oppressive the culture or the political situation may be.

Restrictions on the church cause new creative means of evangelism to arise. In a restricted country of Asia, one such creative method is to hire a bus and invite relatives and friends to a free outing to the beach. Once in the bus, the pastor with a hand-held loudspeaker starts preaching to his "captive audience" about the love of Christ. At the beach the sharing and

fellowship continues…as well as a water baptism for new believers.

In Soviet Russia, a group of Christians took advantage of the funeral of a small daughter of one of the members to present a public evangelistic witness. On the way to the cemetery, they stopped every few hundred meters to sing triumphant songs of praise. The father of the dead child also gave a clear message of salvation in Christ. Many listeners along the way were deeply touched.

In Vietnam, Pastor Ho Hieu Ha spent over six years in prison for pastoring a growing church right under the noses of the unhappy prison authorities. But he felt that his imprisonment was not a waste because he used the time to witness to others who were also in prison. When he was released, he had led ninety-six people to Jesus and discipled them.

He said, "I am committed to sharing Christ's love with others. It is a primary function of the church."

Pray for those in restricted environments as they creatively find ways to witness about their faith.

<u>Here are some beautiful words of wisdom from Proverbs for all of us:</u>

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.
The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.
The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.
A fool spurns a parent's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.
The house of the righteous contains great treasure, but the income of the wicked brings ruin.
The lips of the wise spread knowledge, but the hearts of fools are not upright. <u>Proverbs 15:1-7.</u>

<u>King Solomon noted that our words reflect what's in our hearts.</u>

This is what he said: "And so, I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So, my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.

A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own work. This too, I see, is from the hand of GOD, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment"? Ecclesiastes 2:17–25.

Ecclesiastes has been described as "perhaps the most perplexing and confusing book of the Bible to the average reader", but it also includes musings and lessons that help us to sharpen our perspective as to what really matters in life. The phrase "under the sun" is used nearly thirty times and describes life in an imperfect, complex world in which life's anomalies are many. Another repeated word is "meaningless," which is used more than thirty-five times. This term expresses frustration. At the same time, this wisdom book encourages perspective beyond the horizontal plane of our limited vision and helps us to see that the best posture for earth-dwellers is to "fear GOD and keep His commandments." Ecclesiastes 12:13.

Dear Loving GOD, Your Holy Word says my heart is desperately wicked. Only You can fully know it and remove the evil that's in it. I simply pray for that to be accomplished. Thank you LORD.

I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the GOD of my salvation: my GOD will hear me. Micah 7:7.

But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the GODs your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the GODs of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15.

Our hearts (as Believers) are filled with GOD's very Spirit. He has come as close as he can possibly be. This, He has promised us.

Being forced into hard places gives us a whole new perspective on life. Things we once valued no longer hold the same value. Small things become big things, and what we once thought big no longer holds such importance.

These hard places allow us to identify with the sufferings of others. It keeps us from having a shallow view of the hardships of others and allows us to truly identify with them. Those who speak of such trials from no experience often judge others who have had such hardship. It is a superficiality of Christian experience that often permeates shallow believers.

Those who have walked in hard places immediately have a kinship with others who have walked there also. They do not need to explain; they merely look at one another with mutual respect and admiration for their common experience. They know that death has worked a special thing in them. This death leads to life in others because of the hard places GOD has taken them through.

It is impossible to appreciate any valley experience while you are in it. However, once you have reached the top of the mountain, you are able to appreciate what terrain you have passed through. You marvel at what you were able to walk through. The valley of the shadow of death has yielded more than you ever thought possible. You are able to appreciate the beauty of the experience and lay aside the sorrow and pain it may have produced.

Death works in you for a greater purpose. If you are there today, be assured that GOD is producing something of much greater value than you will ever know.

Draw near to GOD and he will draw near to you. James 4:8.

This verse means that there is a precious experience of peace and assurance and harmony and intimacy that is not unconditional. It depends on our not grieving the Spirit.

It depends on our putting away bad habits. It depends on forsaking the petty inconsistencies of our Christian lives. It depends on our walking closely with GOD and aiming at the highest degree of holiness.

If this is true, I fear that the easily spoken reassurances today that GOD's love is unconditional may stop people from doing the very things the Bible says they need to do in order to have the peace that they so desperately crave. In trying to give peace through "unconditionality" we may be cutting people off from the very remedy the Bible prescribes.

Let us declare untiringly the good news that our justification is based on the worth of Christ's obedience and sacrifice, not ours. Romans 5:19, "as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous".

But let us also declare the biblical truth that the enjoyment of that justification in its effect on our joy and confidence and power to grow in likeness to Jesus is conditioned on our actively forsaking sins and forsaking bad habits and mortifying lusts and pursuing intimacy with Christ, and not grieving the Spirit.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 1 Peter 5:8.

As we move farther on and mount higher up in the Christian life, we may expect to encounter greater difficulties in the way and meet increased hostility from the enemy of our souls.

Satan hates the true Christian for several reasons. One is that GOD loves him, and whatever is loved by GOD is sure to be hated by the devil. Another is that the Christian, being a child of GOD, bears a family resemblance to the Father and to the household of faith. Satan's ancient jealousy has not abated nor his hatred for GOD diminished in the slightest. Whatever reminds him of GOD is without other reason the object of his malignant hate.

A third reason is that a true Christian is a former slave who has escaped from the galley, and Satan cannot forgive him for this affront. A fourth reason is that a praying Christian is a constant threat to the stability of Satan's government. The Christian is a holy rebel loose in the world with access to the throne of GOD. Satan never knows from what direction the danger will come.

Jesus says that His blood is poured out for "many," not for "all." Matthew 26:28. His death is not effectual for all people who have ever lived; Christ's death is effectual only for His people, securing eternal salvation for all those who trust in the promises of GOD through Him. Because He has made an atonement for all those in Him, our pursuit of holiness is not in vain, for Christ is transforming us into His image as we work out our salvation. Philippians 2:12–13.

But now, this is what the LORD says, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. Isaiah 43:1-2.

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people but love your neighbor as yourself. Leviticus 19:18.

Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of GOD. John 3: 20-21.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of GOD! And that is what we are! 1 John 3:1.

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:36.

We, as Children of GOD may rest assured of the Holy Spirit's presence in our daily lives as declared in Colossians where Paul explains that they continually ask GOD to fill their fellow believers with the knowledge of GOD's will in their lives through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives. Colossians 1:9. This teaches us that The Holy Spirit gives wisdom and understanding. This is yet another extremely valuable gift of the Holy Spirit's presence within us.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11.

But Christ is faithful over GOD's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. Hebrews 3:6.

GOD's House ?? What does that mean? The church of Jesus Christ is the house of GOD today. Which means that Jesus this morning — not just back in Moses' day or in his own days on earth — but this morning is our Maker, our Owner, our Ruler, and our Provider.
He's the Son; we are the servants. We are the household of GOD. Moses is one with us in this household, and he is our fellow servant through his prophetic ministry. But Jesus is our Maker, our Owner, our Ruler, and our Provider.

And the text concludes by saying we are his house — we are his people. We are partakers of a heavenly calling — "if we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope." The evidence that we are part of the household of GOD is that we don't throw away our hope. Hebrews 10:35 says, "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward"—we don't drift into indifference and unbelief.

Becoming a Christian and being a Christian happen in the same way: by hoping in Jesus — a kind of hoping that produces confidence and boasting in Jesus.

What are you hoping in today? Where are you looking for confidence? In yourself? In shrewd investing? In physical fitness programs? In hard work? In luck?

The Word of GOD to you today is, "Consider Jesus." And hope in him. Then you will be part of his house and he will be your Maker, your Owner, your Ruler, and your Provider.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your GOD am holy." Leviticus 19:1-2. No one whose senses have been exercised to know good and evil must grieve over the sight of zealous souls seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit while they are yet living in a state of moral carelessness or borderline sin. Such a thing is a moral contradiction. Whoever would be filled and indwelt by the Spirit should first judge his life for any hidden sins and iniquities; he should courageously expel from his heart everything which is out of accord with the character of GOD as revealed by the Holy Scriptures.

At the root of all true Christian experience must lie a sound and sane morality. No joys are valid, no delights legitimate where sin is allowed to live in life or conduct. No transgression of pure righteousness dares to excuse itself on the ground of superior religious experience. To seek high emotional states while living in sin is to throw our whole life open to self-deception and the judgment of GOD. "Be ye holy" is not a mere motto to be framed and hung on the wall. It is a serious commandment from the LORD of the whole earth.

Father, deliver me from 'moral carelessness and borderline sin.' I commit myself today, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to a holiness of life that will be pleasing to You. In Jesus' Name Amen.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. John 15:16.

The first request of us from the persecuted church in today's world is that we pray for them. And correspondingly, they are usually great models of people of prayer which we can emulate. But we often need to be reminded that they do not ask us only to pray for them but also to pray with them. If we only pray for them, we will pray for their safety and the termination of their persecution. They want us to pray with them which means we will pray for: the advance of the gospel in their land; that they will bear fruit that will last; and for perseverance and fearless courage in the face of suffering.

Today I will not only pray for the persecuted but I will also pray with the persecuted. LORD may my life glorify You today and may I be a lasting fruit bearer who only desires that Your will be done. In Jesus' Name, Amen

For it is GOD's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as GOD's slaves. 1 Peter 2:15-16.

For we are GOD's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which GOD prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10.

Does your life work bring pleasure to the LORD? Do you understand that GOD instilled certain gifts and talents in you so that He might find pleasure in His creation of you? Take pleasure in the gifts GOD has given to you this day and let His glory shine through you.

Learning to believe in what is unseen is called faith. Our faith is developed and matured during a lifetime of events and their results. Results of these events demonstrate the reality of our faith. Maturing of our faith takes time and trust.

Do not be deceived, GOD is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. Galatians 6:7.

Sin, in addition to anything else it may be, is always an act of wrong judgment. To commit a sin a man must for the moment believe that things are different from what they really are; he must confound values; he must see the moral universe out of focus; he must accept a lie as truth and see truth as a lie; he must ignore the signs on the highway and drive with his eyes shut; he must act as if he had no soul, and was not accountable for his moral choices.

Sin is never a thing to be proud of. No act is wise that ignores remote consequences, and sin always does. Sin sees only today, or at most tomorrow, never the day after tomorrow, next month or next year. Death and judgment are pushed aside as if they did not exist and the sinner becomes for the time a practical atheist who by his act denies not only the existence of GOD but the concept of life after death.

The notion that the careless sinner is the smart fellow and the serious-minded Christian, though well-intentioned, is a stupid dummy altogether out of touch with life will not stand up under scrutiny. Sin is basically an act of moral folly, and the greater the folly the greater the fool.

Dear GOD, please keep me from sin today. To sin is indeed so foolish, and yet the tendency is so strong! Deliver me from 'moral folly,' once again by the power of Your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to GOD. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 1 Peter 3:18.

When you find yourself in the valley of affliction, that is the time to press into GOD. When the time comes to bring you out of this valley, He will heal your memories and bring fruit from this very time.

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. Ephesians 4:31.

Let's discuss "dispositional sin" (that is, to have bad feelings in your heart toward someone else). Many Christians are guilty of this sin. We are told to "Love one another." Dispositional sins are fully as injurious to the Christian cause as the more overt acts of wickedness. These sins are as many as the various facets of human nature. Just so there may be no misunderstanding let us list a few of them: Sensitiveness, irritability, churlishness, faultfinding, peevishness, temper, resentfulness, cruelty, uncharitable attitudes; and of course, there are many more. These kill the spirit of the church and slow down any progress which the gospel may be making in the community. Many persons who had been secretly longing to find Christ have been turned away and embittered by manifestations of ugly dispositional flaws in the lives of the very persons who were trying to win them....

Unsaintly saints are the tragedy of Christianity. People of the world usually pass through the circle of disciples to reach Christ, and if they find those disciples severe and sharp-tongued they can hardly be blamed if they sigh and turn away from Him.... The low state of religion in our day is largely due to the lack of public confidence in religious people.

Oh LORD, may I never be an 'unsaintly saint!' Give me a pleasant disposition today, not that people would be attracted to me, but that through me they may be irresistibly drawn to Christ. Amen."

Take joy in believing in GOD's promise, "Let your heart not be troubled, believe in GOD and also in me, there are many rooms in my father's house...I will come back and take you with me." John 14:1-3. So, one day I will be with Him in His heavenly home where there will be no more sorrow, crying or pain.

Today, receive this encouragement that no matter what happens; following Jesus gives us hope. He cannot lie. Accept this beautiful truth with joy and excitement looking forward to a magnificent eternity with our LORD And SAVIOR.

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Colossians 3:12.

Therefore, as GOD's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the LORD forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to GOD with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the LORD Jesus, giving thanks to GOD the Father through him. Colossians 3:12-17.

In Colossians 3, Paul reminded his readers of their status as a people chosen by GOD. Because we're chosen, we have certain obligations that are relational in nature. Since we have a reconciled relationship to GOD, to whom we were once enemies. We are to be in healthy relationship to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore, Paul instructed us to put on those virtues listed as we would put on literal garments. Colossians 3:12–14. The characteristics he shared are critical to establishing and maintaining healthy relationships. Our restored relationship to GOD should lead us to extend compassion, kindness, and patience to our fellow believers. This, however, means that we'll necessarily need to "bear with each other" when conflicts and misunderstandings arise. We can't put on these virtues without love, "which binds them all together in perfect unity".

Precious LORD Jesus, thank You for showing me overflowing, unlimited kindness. Help me to find joy in doing kind acts for others.

May the GOD of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus. Romans 15:5.

"Be not satisfied until in your own inmost soul you can say, GOD is an infinitely lovely Being!" My precious LORD GOD is my all in all. There is need of nothing else to obtain true happiness".

You will know that you have given full surrender to Jesus Christ when power, money, and position no longer have meaning in your life. Paul the apostle said he came to a place where his life was the life of Christ only. It is a sacrificial life, but it is also a life of freedom, purpose, and meaning. Let GOD take full control and see His life lived fully through you.

Philippians 2:5-11 is considered to be an early type of hymn. It goes like this: In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature GOD, did not consider equality with GOD something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore, GOD exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of GOD the Father. In light of this, the celebration of Jesus is also a call to follow Jesus' example. GOD-honoring celebration has the effect of encouraging greater obedience and a deeper faith. Jesus, thank you for the gift of music. Help me to use it to worship you, praise you, glorify you and draw closer to you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THE MARVEL OF CREATION

GOD gives all things their own body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. 1 Corinthians 15:38.

I have been picking up little things in Scripture that show GOD's intimate involvement in creation.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 15:38 Paul is comparing how a seed is planted in one form and comes forth in another form with

a "body" different from all other bodies. He says, "GOD gives it a body just as he wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own."

This is a remarkable statement of GOD's involvement in the way GOD designed each seed to bring forth its own unique plant (not just species but each individual seed!).

Paul is not teaching about evolution here, but he is showing how he takes GOD's intimate involvement with creation for granted. He cannot imagine, evidently, that any natural process should be conceived without GOD's doing it.

Again in Psalm 94:9, it says, "He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?" The psalmist assumes that GOD was the designer of the eye and that he designed the way the ear is planted in the head to do its hearing work.

So, when we marvel at the wonders of the human eye and the remarkable structure of the ear, we are not to marvel at the processes of chance but at the mind and the creativity of GOD.

Similarly, in Psalm 95:5, "The sea is his for he made it; and his hands formed the dry land." The involvement of GOD in making land and sea is such that the present sea is his.

It is not as though he in some impersonal way set it all in motion a billion years ago. Rather he is the one who owns it because he made it. It is today his handiwork and bears the marks of his creator claim on it, like a piece of artwork belongs to the one who painted it until he sells it or gives it away.

I point out these things not to solve all the problems surrounding the issues of origins, but to call you to be GOD-centered in your admiration of the wonders of the world.

SELF.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of GOD, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Galatians 2:20. This scripture addresses our "SELF".

Now, let us elaborate on this subject of self. To be specific, the self-sins are self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence,

self-sufficiency, self-admiration, self-love and a host of others like them. They dwell too deep within us and are too much a part of our natures to come to our attention till the light of GOD is focused upon them.

There are in fact "grosser" manifestations of these sins. They are, Egotism, exhibitionism, self-promotion and are strangely tolerated in Christian leaders, even in circles of impeccable orthodoxy. They are so much in evidence as actually, for many people, to become identified with the gospel. I trust I am not being cynical by saying that they appear these days to be a requirement for popularity in some sections of the church visibly. Promoting self under the guise of promoting Christ is currently so common that it draws little notice.

Self is the opaque veil that hides the face of GOD from us. It can be removed only in spiritual experience, never by mere instruction. We may as well try to instruct leprosy or some other disease out of our system. There must be a work of GOD in destruction before we are free. We must invite the cross to do its deadly work within us. We must bring our self-sins to the cross for judgment.

"Oh LORD, do that work of GOD in destruction of SELF_within me today. I am indeed crucified with Christ. I pray that the cross would obliterate the self-sins in my life and let me live only for Jesus Christ and His glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Open my eyes so that I may see wonderful things in your law. Psalm 119:18.

When is the last time someone saw something happen through your life that could not be explained other than GOD working in your life? When you begin to see this happen, you will be modeling ministry as Jesus modeled it. You will be bringing the Church to the people, not the people to the church. Pray that GOD makes you a vessel of His power, not simply a vessel of words.

Zephaniah was an Old Testament prophet who spoke for GOD, just as other Old Testament prophets had done. The divine

message he was to deliver required Zephaniah to possess unique qualifications, for GOD called him to deliver a message his audience didn't want to hear. The message wasn't fun to preach and contained difficult and even disgusting metaphors. Nevertheless, Zephaniah communicated judgment upon the house of Judah with great authority. How could he stand strong and deliver his message with passion in the face of entrenched opposition? Make sure you follow the pattern Zephaniah did: 1. Believe in your GOD. Zephaniah had to trust in GOD to protect and empower him to communicate the message. 2. Believe in your message. Zephaniah had to be convinced that this hard message was exactly what the people needed to hear. 3. Believe in your cause. Zephaniah had to embrace his ultimate cause. 4. Believe in your people. Zephaniah had to have hope that the people would change and buy into his message. 5. Believe in yourself. Zephaniah had to be convinced that he was the man to deliver this message.

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your GOD; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10.

When I am anxious about my ministry to others (witnessing) I don't want my words to be useless and empty, so I fight unbelief with the promise of Isaiah 55:11. "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

When I am anxious about being too weak to do my work, I battle unbelief with the promise of Christ, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9.

When I am anxious about decisions I have to make about the future, I battle unbelief with the promise, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you." Psalm 32:8.

When I am anxious about facing opponents in my life, I battle unbelief with the promise, "If GOD is for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31.

When I am anxious about the welfare of those I love, I battle unbelief with the promise that if I, being evil, know how to give good things to my children, how much more will the "Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?" Matthew 7:11.

Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls. Proverbs 25:28.

"LORD, deliver me from any tendency to an uncontrolled temper. Keep me from the loss of credibility that can do irreparable harm to my ministry to others. Make me a pure vessel. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

The LORD's presence in the LORD's Supper is not easy to conceptualize, but we do affirm that He is truly present every time we take the sacrament with other believers. It is best for us to remind ourselves of this fact and realize that the sacrament is not an afterthought, it is a means of grace that conveys to the faithful the benefits we need to progress in holiness. As you take the Supper, consider the presence of Christ and the way He meets all our needs.

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Ephesians 6:19-20.

Be careful to examine yourselves and keep watch over your inner life. This will help you to keep your guard up against spiritual dangers from without and spiritual apathy from within.

It's easy for us to let our guard down and fall into apathy and self-deception. But GOD can give us strength to avoid falling in life and forgiveness by His grace when we do. By following Him and resting in His wisdom and provision, we can keep our guard up and make good decisions.

Dear GOD, please help me to remain alert and follow You in loving obedience. In Jesus' Name, Amen

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. Psalm 119:105. The Holy Word of GOD is meant to direct us along our path in life. A lamp is for seeing. Thus, by reading and obeying GOD's Word we may walk our path of life and prevent stumbling along the way. Let His Holy Word cast it perfect light on your path. But remember, a lamp is of no value if it is not lit. You must turn it on and keep it lit. Read His Holy Word at every opportunity.

Earth is GOD's business. He has set up many franchises (churches) designed to send His representatives (Body of Christ) into the world to make known the best product ever given to mankind (Jesus). His branch managers (pastors) have been given the responsibility to teach and support those in the field. GOD's goal is to establish a franchise in every nation, state, and city. It is the ultimate business because when you introduce someone to His product (Jesus), you receive a reward from the home office (Heaven). GOD has promised that His representatives will have all the tools and customer support needed to accomplish their strategic plans.

GOD has big plans for His franchise. He wants every human being to partake of His product; however, even GOD knows that not everyone will. Nevertheless, this does not thwart His efforts in seeking to make it known among His audience.

You have been called to be part of the ultimate franchise. How many new recruits have you been responsible for bringing into the franchise lately?

When I am anxious about being sick, I battle unbelief with the promise, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all." Psalm 34:19. And I take the promise with trembling, "knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because GOD's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." Romans 5:3–5.

When I am anxious about getting old, I battle unbelief with the promise: "Even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save." Isaiah 46:4.

When I am anxious about dying, I battle unbelief with the promise that "none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the LORD, and if we die, we die to the LORD. So then, whether we live or whether we die. We are the LORD's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be LORD both of the dead and of the living." Romans 14:7–9.

When I am anxious that I may make shipwreck of faith and fall away from GOD, I battle unbelief with the promises, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:6 and, "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to GOD through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." Hebrews 7:25.

Let us make war, not with other people, but with our own unbelief. It is the root of anxiety, which in turn, is the root of so many other sins.

So let us turn our eyes fixed on the precious and very great promises of GOD. Take up the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit for help, lay the promises up in your heart, and fight the good fight — to live by faith in future grace.

We encourage you to live lives worthy of GOD, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:12.

Now may our GOD and Father himself and our LORD Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the LORD make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our GOD and Father when our LORD Jesus comes with all his holy ones. Thessalonians 3:11–13.

Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by GOD to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of GOD's family throughout

Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. 1 Thessalonians 4:9–1.

The apostle Paul cared about the reputation of the gospel. In his letter to the Thessalonian church, he wanted to remove any obstacle that would prevent the hope of Jesus from impacting the city. He had good reason too. When the apostle first visited Thessalonica, his proclamation of the gospel caused quite the stir, which devolved into riots, shouting, & arrests. Acts 17:1-9.

In his letter to the church that grew after he left, Paul told the people to not just show love for each other but to also live quietly and mind their own business. 1 Thessalonians 4:11. Why? Verse 12 says that by doing so "your daily life may win the respect of outsiders." The apostle wanted the fledgling church to know that peace and respectability were their greatest assets in advancing the message of Jesus in the world.

Dear LORD GOD, thank You that I don't need to avoid the duties and rhythms of daily life to experience Your beauty. Help me to know the joy of a quiet life lived with You.

As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the LORD finally brought about. The LORD is full of compassion and mercy. James 5:11.

Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone. Proverbs 25:15.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:14.

Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may

be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask GOD, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. James 1:3-5.

We know that in all things GOD works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28.

Be very careful, then, how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the LORD's will is. Ephesians 5:15–17.

To live a meaningful and purposeful life, "a life worthy of the calling." Ephesians 4:1. Paul told believers to be careful, wise, and make "the most of every opportunity" to do good. Being careful is being wise, for an unwise person or a fool is both careless and reckless. Proverbs 12:15. Careful living means living as "children of light" and striving to do "what pleases the LORD." Ephesians 5:8. In another letter, Paul said, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity to share the gospel." Colossians 4:5. To the Galatian believers he said, "Let us not become weary in doing good. As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Galatians 6:9–10.

Dear Jesus, cultivate a heart of wisdom in me. Enable me to live my life in a way that will always draw me closer to You.

As we go through life we sometimes wonder "What is truth"? Here is what the Holy Bible says about the subject. "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." John 17:17.

As GOD entrusts us with more and more responsibility, He brings more and more pressures into our lives to "test the product," to make sure that He can give even more responsibility to us. This process helps us see where we are in our maturity and determines our level of future responsibility.

Are you a product that can withstand the product test? Will you perform as the Maker designed no matter what outside pressures come? Know that you cannot perform well unless you are continually in a relationship with and obedient to the one

who made you. Trust the product developer today. He has made you to perform well under pressure.

Put on the new self, created after the likeness of GOD in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:24.

Christianity means change is possible. Deep, fundamental change. It is possible to become tenderhearted when once you were callous and insensitive. It is possible to stop being dominated by bitterness and anger. It is possible to become a loving person no matter what your background has been.

The Bible assumes that GOD is the decisive factor in making us what we should be. With wonderful bluntness, the Bible says, "Put away malice and be tenderhearted." It does not say, "If you can..." Or: "If your parents were tender-hearted to you..." Or: "If you weren't terribly wronged..." It says, "Be tender-hearted."

This is wonderfully freeing. It frees us from the terrible fatalism that says change is impossible for me. It frees me from mechanistic views that make my background my destiny.

And GOD's commands always come with freeing, life-changing truth to believe. For example:

GOD adopted us as his children. We have a new Father and a new family. This breaks the fatalistic forces of our "family-of-origin." "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for one is your Father, He who is in heaven." Matthew 23:9.

GOD loves us as his children. We are "loved children." The command to imitate the love of GOD does not hang in the air, it comes with power: "Be imitators of GOD as loved children." Love is the command and being loved is the power.

GOD has forgiven us in Christ. Be tender-hearted and forgiving just as GOD in Christ forgave you. What GOD gave us is power to change. The command to be tender-hearted has more to do with what GOD did for you than what your mother did to you. This kind of command means you can change.

Christ loved you and gave himself up for you. "Walk in love just as Christ loved you." The command comes with a life-changing truth. "Christ loved you." At the moment when there is a chance

to love and some voice says, “You are not a loving person,” you can say, “Christ’s love for me makes me a new kind of person.” His command to love is just as surely possible for me as his promise of love is true for me.

Sexual sin is seriously affecting the Church. The pure religion of Christ that flows like a crystal river from the heart of GOD is being polluted by the unclean waters that trickle from behind the altars of abomination that appear on every high hill and under every green tree from New York to Los Angeles. Bear in mind also that this affects both men and women. It is not only pornography but marriage unfaithfulness, etc.

"LORD, we pray this today for any of Your servants who are caught in the trap of immorality or pornography. This whole filthy, vulgar trap has so many in its clutches. Please give victory today, we pray, in Jesus' name Amen."

Zechariah 13 says that even though believers may sinfully abandon their master, He will not abandon them and will present them as a holy people to His Father. If you have sinned this day, it is not too late to seek GOD’s favor. Repent and return to Him and in so doing prove that you are one of His sheep.

Today I affirm my faith in a miracle working GOD who can release me from my chains.

GOD demonstrated the power of prayer in Peter’s prison experience. After the apostle was seized by Herod’s men, thrown into prison, and then guarded by four squads of four soldiers each Acts 12:4 his prospects looked bleak. But the church was earnestly praying to GOD for him. They had Peter in their thoughts and prayers. What GOD did is simply miraculous! An angel appeared to Peter in prison, released him from his chains, and led him to safety beyond the prison gates.

It’s possible some may use the term “thoughts and prayers” without really meaning it. But our Father knows our thoughts, listens to our prayers, and acts on our behalf according to His perfect will. To be prayed for and to pray for others is no small thing when we serve the great and powerful GOD.

Jesus, thank You that I can bring every care to You and that You listen.

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. Psalms 1:41.

When you make a vow to GOD, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. Ecclesiastes 5:4.

It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should GOD be angry with what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore, stand in awe of GOD? Ecclesiastes 5:5-7.

GOD tells us that He will destroy the work of our hands for failure to fulfill vows. That's pretty strong language. It gives us an indication of how important fulfilling vows is to GOD. He will not prosper our work if there are unfulfilled vows in our lives.

Are there any unfulfilled vows in your life that may be hindering your projects? Vows show up in many areas of our lives, marriages, businesses, personal friendships. Unfulfilled vows in any one of these could be the reason your work may be hindered.

Ask GOD today if there are any unfulfilled vows in your life. If so, begin today to make them right so that you may be successful in whatever GOD calls you to do.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when

he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." Luke 9:23-26.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of GOD's mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to GOD—this is your true and proper worship. Romans 12:1.

Have I dedicated my life to GOD's purposes or my own?

For the word of GOD is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12.

We often operate with an unwritten code that says our needs must have a certain degree of importance or crisis before we come to GOD with them. This is not GOD's character towards us.

Does the LORD desire this level of intimacy with you and me? The apostle Paul exhorted us to "pray without ceasing." There is never a caution to pray only about matters of great importance. 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

Today, go to GOD with matters that you might view as trivial and would normally avoid bringing to GOD. Ask GOD to increase your level of intimacy with Him.

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. Psalm 95:1-2.

Both Jews (to whom GOD gave his law) and Gentiles (to whom he did not give his law) come to GOD by having faith in Jesus' atonement. The GOD who wants to be close to us has freely offered this gift to us all.

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will

live, because those who are led by the Spirit of GOD are sons of GOD. Romans 8:13-14.

Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16.

Every one of us needs help. We are not GOD. We have needs. We have weaknesses. We have confusion. We have limitations of all kinds. We need help.

But every one of us has something else: we have sins. And therefore, at the bottom of our hearts we know that we do not deserve the help we need. And so we feel trapped.

I need help to live my life and to handle death and to cope with eternity — help with my family, my spouse, my children, my loneliness, my job, my health, my finances. I need help. But I don't deserve the help I need.

So, what can I do? I can try to deny it all and be a superman who doesn't need any help. Or I can try to drown it all and throw my life into a pool of sensual pleasures. Or I can simply give way to the paralysis of despair.

But GOD declares over this hopeless conclusion: Jesus Christ became a High Priest to shatter that despair with hope and to humble that superman or superwoman and to rescue that drowning wretch.

Yes, we all need help. Yes, none of us deserves the help we need. But no to despair and pride and lechery. Look at what GOD says. Because we have a great High Priest, the throne of GOD is a throne of grace. And the help we get at that throne is mercy and grace to help in time of need. Grace to help! Not deserved help, gracious help.

You are not trapped. Say no to that lie. We need help. We don't deserve it but we can have it. You can have it right now and forever. If you will receive and trust in your High Priest, Jesus the Son of GOD, and draw near to GOD through him.

Search me, O GOD, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24.

The philosopher Socrates said, "An unexamined life is not worth living." If a common philosopher could think that, how much more we Christians ought to listen to the Holy Spirit when He says, "Examine yourself." An unexamined Christian lies like an unattended garden. Let your garden go unattended for a few months, and you will not have roses and tomatoes but weeds. An unexamined Christian life is like an unkempt house. Lock your house up as tight as you will and leave it long enough, and when you come back you will not believe the dirt that got in from somewhere. An unexamined Christian is like an untaught child. A child that is not taught will be a little savage. It takes examination, teaching, instruction, discipline, caring, tending, weeding and cultivating to keep the life right.

Honestly presenting our hopes and fears before the LORD carries with it the danger that we might sin and become mad at Him when His will does not match ours. Nevertheless, we may humbly admit all that is weighing upon us as long as we, like Christ, do not rebel against GOD's purposes. Consider today how honest you are in prayer and strive to present your concerns honestly to the LORD, yet with submission to whatever His plan may be.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone for the hope that you have. 1 Peter 3:15.

Almighty GOD, thank You for giving me credible evidence (Creation) to support my faith in You. Viewing and acknowledging His creation is the credible evidence that we possess.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life comes not from the Father but from the world.

1 John 2:15-16.

I always thank my GOD for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way

with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge. 1 Corinthians 1:4-5.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of GOD, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Romans 3:23-24.

We receive this precious gift of redemption not by following GOD's law but by faithfully accepting what he did for us: "GOD presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith." Romans 3:25.

While we know of the Jewish exile, it may seem remote, but consider this. You actually live as an exile on this earth. This is not your home, but if you believe there's nothing to do but wait here complacently until the end comes, you will miss out on truly living. To have hope in exile is to live with fervor in the here and now. Jeremiah reminds you to seek the prosperity of the place where you're living, not the place you hope to be. He basically states the familiar adage, "Bloom where you're planted." You won't always be in exile. There will come a day when GOD wipes every tear from your eyes, and there will no longer be death or mourning or weeping or pain . But until then? Bloom. Live. Demonstrate your future hope that is promised in Revelation 21:4. Act today to bless your present circumstances. There is much joyful work to do!

Dear LORD, as I am exiled here, I pray you will help me to live with hope. I truly want to bloom where you've planted me, no matter my circumstances. Thank you for hope. Thank you for teaching me perseverance while I am exiled here on earth. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Our Holy Bible tells us that to die is GAIN. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Philippians 1:21.

How is it "gain" to die? Look at the following 5 explanations:

1) Our spirits will be made perfect. Hebrews 12:22-23.

There will be no more sin in us. We will be done with the inner war and the heartrending disappointments of offending the LORD who loved us and gave himself for us.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living GOD, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and the church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to GOD, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the just which have been made perfect.

2) We will be relieved of the pain of this world. Luke 16:25.

The joy of the resurrection will not yet be ours, but the joy of freedom from pain will be. Jesus tells the story of Lazarus and the rich man to show the great reversal that is coming.

The rich man cried out and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony."

3) We will be given profound rest in our soul. Revelation 6:9-11.

There will be a serenity beneath the eye and care of GOD that surpasses anything we have known here on the softest summer evening by the most peaceful lake at our most happy moments.

I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of GOD, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice saying, "How long, O LORD, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer.

4) We will experience a deep at-homeness. 2 Corinthians 5:8.

The whole human race is homesick for GOD, without knowing it. When we go home to Christ there will be a contentment beyond any sense of security and peace we have ever known.

We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the LORD.

5) We will be with Christ. Philippians 1:21–23.

Christ is a more wonderful person than anyone on earth. He is wiser, stronger, and kinder than anyone you enjoy spending time with. He is endlessly interesting. He knows exactly what to do and what to say at every moment to make his guests as glad as they can possibly be. He overflows in love and with infinite insight into how to use that love to make his loved ones feel loved. Therefore, Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better.

To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. Titus 1:15.

But when a conscience has become seared, when a man has played with the fire and burned his conscience and calloused it until he can handle the hot iron of sin without shrinking, there is no longer any safety for him.

Paul wrote in his epistle about those to whom nothing is pure any longer, "but even their mind and conscience is defiled."

Here Paul speaks of an inward corruption, revealed in impure thoughts and soiled language. I am just as afraid of people with soiled tongues as I am of those with a communicable disease.

Actually, a foul tongue is evidence of a deeper spiritual disease and Paul goes on to tell us that those with defiled consciences become reprobates, something just washed up on the shore, a moral shipwreck.

Oh LORD, deliver me from that inward corruption. Guard my mind and my tongue; convict me of any carelessness or straying. Keep my conscience alive and active. LORD, I really don't want to end up a moral shipwreck. Washed up on the shore, in Jesus' Holy Name, Amen."

What is your first thought when someone offends you? Anger? Indignation? Perhaps, if we're honest, our hearts even want to see some kind of retaliation or revenge. But you know, Jesus is

clear: revenge is not the answer. Love is, especially when it comes to the Muslim world. That's why, instead of retaliating when we read of a bomb attack against our fellow believers, I suggest our response should be repentance! Repentance that we have not prayed, have not cared, have not gone to the Muslim world to proclaim the true life and freedom we have in Jesus! Let's keep asking GOD to truly change our hearts so that we might love, serve and pray more fervently for the advancement of His kingdom and the glory of His name in the Muslim world and beyond! I will seek to keep my eyes on Jesus and try to understand things from His perspective.

After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. John 2:22.

The Apostle John said, "the point of his gospel is that we may believe that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of GOD, and that by believing we may have life in his name." John 20:31.

Father in heaven, thank You for letting me live long enough to see Your ability to show up and reveal the wonder of Your presence in ways I could not have foreseen.

We are instructed in The Holy Bible to persevere during different circumstances that we will encounter in life. The Word Of GOD says, "Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 100:4-5.

GOD offers us the hope we need along our journey. Our Higher Power is the one and only true Higher Power and he has a name: Jesus Christ. In the past you may have believed in Jesus' existence and even attended church. But have you had a personal relationship with Christ? Jesus desires a hands-on, day-to-day, moment-by-moment intimacy with us. We'll begin to

understand that he can do for us what we've never been able to do for ourselves. That's what Romans 11:36 is telling us. We can't complete anything unless we start. Jesus informs us in Matthew 17:20 just how much faith we need in order to get going: "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." It's reassuring to know that we don't need a heaping helping of faith to begin our relationship with him. We need only a smidgen. "Faith as small as a mustard seed" for GOD to get busy effecting change in our hearts. If we're only willing to utilize whatever faith we can muster in Jesus, our lives will be changed. We'll find the courage to reach out and take hold of Christ's hand, so that we can face the present with confidence and the future with realistic expectancy.

THE KEY TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Hebrews 5:14.

Now this is amazing. Don't miss it. It could save you years of wasted living.

What this verse is saying is that if you want to become mature and understand the more solid teachings of the Word, then the rich, nutritional, precious milk of GOD's gospel promises must transform your moral senses, your spiritual mind so that you can discern between good and evil.

Or let me put it another way. Getting ready to feast on all of GOD's Word is not first an intellectual challenge; it is first a moral challenge. If you want to eat the solid food of the Word, you must exercise your spiritual senses so as to develop a mind that discerns between good and evil.

The startling truth is that, if you stumble over understanding Melchizedek in Genesis and Hebrews, it may be because you watch questionable TV programs. If you stumble over the doctrine of election, it may be because you still use some shady business practices. If you stumble over the GOD-centered work of Christ on the cross, it may be because you love money and spend too much and give too little.

The pathway to maturity and to solid biblical food is not first becoming an intelligent person but becoming an obedient person. What you do with alcohol and sex and money and leisure and food and computers has more to do with your capacity for solid food than where you go to school or what books you read.

This is so important because in our highly technological society we are prone to think that education, especially intellectual development, is the key to maturity. There are many Ph.D.'s who choke in their spiritual immaturity on the things of GOD. And there are many less-educated saints who are deeply mature and can feed with pleasure and profit on the deepest things of GOD's Word.

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin but present yourselves to GOD as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to GOD. Romans 6:12-13.

It is disheartening to those who care, and surely a great grief to the Spirit, to see how many Christians are content to settle for less than the best. There are some evangelical Christians who somewhere in their past have managed to strike a base compromise with their heart's holier longings and have settled down to a lukewarm, mediocre kind of Christianity utterly unworthy of themselves and of the LORD they claim to serve. And such are found everywhere.

Every man is as close to GOD as he wants to be. He is as holy and as full of the Spirit as he wills to be.

Yet we must distinguish wanting from wishing. By "want" I mean wholehearted desire. Certainly, there are many who wish they were holy or victorious or joyful but are not willing to meet GOD's conditions to obtain.

Oh LORD, give me that wholehearted desire that keeps me from being satisfied with mediocre Christianity. I long to be as holy and as full of the Spirit as You want me to be. I commit myself to a willingness to meet Your "conditions to obtain." In Jesus Holy Name, Amen.

Scripture contrasts a wise and a foolish person, and one of the many distinctions between the two is humility about the future. Proverbs 27:1. A wise person recognizes that only GOD truly knows what's over the horizon as they make decisions. But foolish people presume knowledge that isn't theirs. May we have wisdom, trusting our future to the only One who actually knows it.

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Romans 5:3-4.

Where do you see the temptation to try to control the future? How can you better trust GOD with your coming days? Dear GOD, help me to simply trust You today.

Come, follow Me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men. Matthew 4:19.

What does GOD want to achieve through your life? GOD has a plan that is so incredible you cannot comprehend it. It requires only that you love Him and follow Him. Then you will become fishers of men like the world has never known.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as LORD, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Colossians 2:6-7.

Those who are led by the Spirit of GOD are sons of GOD. Romans 8:14.

As children of GOD, we are called to be led by the Spirit. This requires a level of dependence on GOD in which many of us really do not want to invest. It requires listening, waiting, and moving only when GOD's Spirit tells us to move. Workplace

believers are "action" people. We know how to get things done, but our greatest strength can be our greatest weakness.

Today, ask GOD to make you a Romans 8:14 kind of person who is led by the Spirit of GOD. Pray against lagging behind or moving ahead. Ask GOD to reveal whether the next project you consider is a good thing or a GOD-thing.

We are to live with an attitude of thanks in our home. Notice Psalm 9:1 doesn't say to give thanks when everything is going well. Instead, it implies that we should be thankful even when circumstances are challenging. It's all about perspective. GOD has blessed us more than we deserve and so we need to be thankful. If your family has food, be thankful. If you can fill the gas tank in your car, give thanks. If you lay your head on a comfortable pillow at night, give thanks. There will always be a temptation to focus on what we don't have instead of what we do possess. Every television commercial tries to convince us that we are missing something. They draw our attention away from gratefulness and toward neediness or merely want. The spirit of thanksgiving is a choice we can make. As your children watch that steady gratitude emerge from our lives, it will be easier for them to keep their eyes off themselves and develop a thankful heart of their own!

It is better to give than to receive and better to give thanks than to want. Acts 20:35.

Have a spirit of thankfulness in your home. You will find that gratitude brings blessings.

Since He had no one greater by whom to swear, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." Hebrews 6:13-14.

There is one Person whose worth and honor and dignity and preciousness and greatness and beauty and reputation is more than all other values combined, ten thousand times more, namely, GOD himself. So, GOD swears by himself.

If He could have gone higher, he would have gone higher. Why? To give you strong encouragement in your hope. What GOD is saying in swearing by himself is that it is as unlikely that he will break his word of promise to bless us as it is that he will despise himself.

GOD is the greatest value in the universe. There is nothing more valuable or wonderful than GOD. So, GOD swears by GOD. And in doing that he says: "I mean for you to have as much confidence in me as it is possible to have." For if more were possible, He would have given us that.

Now this is our GOD. The GOD who is reaching as high as he can reach to inspire your unshakable hope. So, flee to GOD for refuge. Turn from all the superficial, self-defeating hopes of the world and put your hope in GOD. There is nothing and no one like GOD as a Refuge and a Rock of hope.

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2:1.

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea. 2 Corinthians 11:23.

The Apostle Paul suffered severely in his ministry of sharing the gospel in the first century. But Paul was always quick to point out that what others thought so terrible, his imprisonment,

GOD turned into good. Rather than hindering the spread of the gospel, it actually aided its advance. Philippians 1:12-14. Paul's example was followed by many disciples down through the ages.

Proverbs 13:12-19 includes two metaphors that concern life: "a longing fulfilled is a tree of life" and "the teaching of the wise is a fountain of life". The first mention of the "tree of life" in Scripture is in Genesis 2:9, a reference to a GOD-given resource for immortality. After the disobedience of our first parents,

access to this life source was denied. Genesis 3:23–24. Revelation 22:2 speaks of a time when access will be restored. Proverbs uses the "tree of life" language metaphorically as a symbol of health and long life, success, and happiness. Similarly, the "fountain of life" refers to a resource from which something healthy and life-sustaining springs forth. Reverence for GOD is one of the blessed fountains from which we may drink .

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. 1 Chronicles 16:34.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the LORD Jesus, giving thanks to GOD the Father through Him. Colossians 3:17.

GOD, through Paul, encourages us to follow the consciences he gives us and have grace with each other. When it comes to gray areas, we are not to judge each other or cause a fellow believer to stumble. We are to do all that we can to live at peace with each other. Under the umbrella of Jesus' salvation, we need to create space for everyone who believes in him.

But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Colossians 3:8.

The root issue you are dealing with is fear. The physical symptom is control, and when you cannot control, you get angry because of unmet expectations.

Anger is like the lights on a dashboard. They tell you something is going on under the hood. You must find out the source of the problem. Whenever we have expectations of another person and those expectations do not materialize, our tendency is to get angry. The source of the anger is often the fear that the unmet expectation will negatively impact us. We fear that our finances, our well-being, our image, or any number of things may be impacted by the unmet expectation.

Jesus often spoke of living as though we were dead. How can you live as though you are dead? "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to GOD in Christ Jesus." Romans 6:11. It is a choice each of us must make. Once you become dead to that which stirs an emotion in you, GOD is free to change that situation. Until then, you can expect GOD to allow that situation to remain until you reckon yourself dead to the effects of the issue that causes you to struggle.

Is there something that causes anger within you? Ask GOD what the source of that anger is. You might be surprised at what you find. Then ask GOD to give you the grace to reckon yourself dead to that issue. You will find new freedom in your relationships and your own peace of mind.

The Holy Bible tells us to "HOLD FAST TO OUR HOPE". What does this mean?

When GOD desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, He guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for GOD to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. Hebrews 6:17-18.

Why does the Apostle Paul encourage us to hold fast to our hope? If our holding fast was obtained and irrevocably secured by the blood of Jesus, then why does GOD tell us to hold fast?

Here is the answer:

What Christ bought for us when he died was not the freedom from having to hold fast but the enabling power to hold fast.

What he bought was not the nullification of our wills as though we didn't have to hold fast, but the empowering of our wills because we want to hold fast.

What he bought was not the canceling of the commandment to hold fast but the fulfillment of the commandment to hold fast.

What he bought was not the end of exhortation, but the triumph of exhortation.

He died so you would do exactly what Paul did in Philippians 3:12, "I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." It is not foolishness, it

is the gospel, to tell a sinner to do what Christ alone can enable him to do, namely, hope in GOD.

So, I exhort you with all my heart: reach out and take hold of that for which you have been taken hold of by Christ and hold it fast with all his might.

Hope remained for Peter after he denied Jesus 3 times. Though he had sinned greatly, his tears and later restoration John 21:15–19 show a repentant heart. No matter the depth of our sin, while we draw breath it is never too late to return to the LORD. He mercifully forgives all, without exception, who mourn their transgressions. This is truth!

Peter's rash vow to remain with the LORD Matthew 26:33 and subsequent failure encourage us not to rely on our own weakness, but to earnestly rely on the Spirit. It is easy to say that we will never deny the LORD. But our flesh is weak, and we should not think ourselves strong apart from the strength He alone can give us. We have all denied Him in some way; let us therefore lean on His Spirit that we may never do so again.

Thank you Dear LORD GOD Almighty for your mercy and grace that You so freely give, if only we will repent when we do wrong and ask for forgiveness and restoration. We should then not forget to express our gratitude by humbly thanking Him.

Today I will not allow fear to control me, especially regarding the public declaration of my faith in Jesus Christ.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. Revelation 21:4.

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from GOD, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! GOD's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and GOD

himself will be with them and be their GOD. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. The old order of things has passed away." Revelation 21:1-5.

Dear GOD, our Creator. You fulfill my deepest longings. I give You my hopes and my desires, asking You to grant them according to Your wisdom and love.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship GOD acceptably with reverence and awe. Hebrews 12:28.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of GOD. No one knows the thoughts of GOD except the Spirit of GOD. As believers, we have the mind of Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:10-11, 16.

It was always GOD's intention for us to be close. When he sent his Spirit to live within us, he showed just how close he intended.

Inside us, GOD dwells. He speaks to us, teaching us. Even though we live in the kingdom that is already here but has not yet fully come, he speaks. He is a joyful, tender, loving, peaceful Voice. The warm Truth.

Through GOD's Spirit, he gives us open access to his mind, the endless brilliance of the deep things of GOD. From the moment we believed in Jesus, we began a journey of exploring GOD's good heart. And this journey will last through eternity because with the Infinite One there's always more to delightfully explore.

It is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of GOD. 2 Corinthians 4:15. This scripture tells us that GOD can extend mercy, grace and forgiveness to us if we will humble ourselves and confess sin and ask for our sins to be forgiven. So, mercy should cause us to be thankful.

Gratitude is joy toward GOD for his grace. But by its very nature, gratitude glorifies the giver. It acknowledges its own need and the grace and mercy of the giver.

Just like I humble myself and exalt the waitress in the restaurant when I say, "Thank you," to her, so I humble myself and exalt GOD when I feel gratitude to him. The difference, of course, is that I really am infinitely in debt to GOD for his grace, and everything he does for me is free and undeserved.

But the point is that gratitude glorifies the giver. It glorifies GOD. And this is Paul's final goal in all his labors: for the sake of the church, but, above and beyond that, for the glory of GOD.

The wonderful thing about the gospel is that the response it requires from us for GOD's glory is also the response which we feel to be most natural and joyful, namely, gratitude for grace. GOD's glory and our gladness are not in competition.

A life that gives glory to GOD for his grace and a life of deepest gladness are always the same life. And what makes them one is gratitude.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Romans 8:1.

GOD knows that sin is a terrible thing, and the devil knows it too. So, he follows us around and as long as we permit it, he will taunt us about our past sins.

As for myself, I have learned to talk back to him on this score. I say, "Yes, Devil, sin is terrible but I remind you that I got it from you! And I remind you, Devil, that everything good, forgiveness and cleansing and blessing, everything that is good I have freely received from Jesus Christ."

Everything that is bad and that is against me I got from the devil so why should he have the nerve and brass to argue with me about it? Yet he will do it because he is the devil, and he is committed to keeping GOD's children shut up in a little cage, their wings clipped so that they can never fly!

Thank You again Father, for Your marvelous forgiveness and cleansing and blessing. I've often heard those taunts from the

Devil; thank You for Your grace that completely silences him. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Matthew 27:1-10 states, "When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood".

All four Evangelists describe Judas as a traitor when he first appears on the scene in the Gospels Matthew. 10:4; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16; John 6:71. On the other hand, Peter is not defined by his betrayal of Jesus in denying the SAVIOR three times. Since Peter repented and was restored John 21:15–19, he is remembered as the rock, not primarily as the denier of Christ. Yet, Judas never turned from his sin and bears the shame of his deed forever.

Matthew's comparison of Peter's denial and Judas' death invites us to compare the state of their souls. Like Peter, Judas is remorseful after the fact, changing his mind about the wisdom of his deed after seeing Jesus condemned. Matthew 27:3–4. Unlike Peter, Judas does not feel the "GODly grief" of repentance 2 Corinthians. 7:10. The Greek verb for Judas' change of mind Matthew. 27:3 is not the one normally used for repentance. Moreover, Judas does not really try to stop what he has started and will not testify of Christ's innocence before Pilate. John Calvin writes, "True repentance is displeasure at sin, arising out of fear and reverence for GOD, and producing, at the same time, a love and desire of righteousness." Were Judas repentant, justice and righteousness would move him to intervene on Jesus' behalf. GODly sorrow leads people to run to GOD, but Judas' despair makes him run into the arms of death.

Once more, the Jewish leaders care more about the minutiae of ceremonial regulation than the greater sin of killing an innocent man. They use the blood money paid to Judas to buy a place to bury Gentiles Matthew 27:6–8, thereby fulfilling prophecy. The text Matthew cites seems to be a paraphrase of Jeremiah 19:1-14 and Zechariah 11. Both prophets allude to Israel's rejecting the shepherds GOD sent to them and the destruction that results. For centuries the Almighty sent His prophets to shepherd His people, but His people rejected them and the destruction of exile occurred. Now with the condemnation of Jesus to death, the leaders have rejected the "Shepherd and

Overseer" of their souls 1 Peter 2:25, and they make themselves even more worthy of GOD's wrath than their ancestors.

Some have said that Judas sinned more in despairing of the mercy of GOD, than in betraying his Master's blood. Neither Judas' betrayal nor his suicide is the unforgiveable sin, only his refusal to seek the grace of Christ. Peter and Judas both committed heinous transgressions, but Peter found restoration when he repented. Today let us repent of our sins and turn to Jesus, knowing that He offers pardon to all those who trust Him alone.

Father, search my heart for anything that may contribute to my distancing myself from you. Cleanse me, forgive me, and use me for Your honor. In Jesus' Name, Amen

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to GOD with gratitude in your hearts. Colossians 3:16.

We are saved eternally by the eternal prayers Romans 8:34 and advocacy 1 John 2:1 of Jesus in heaven as our high priest. He prays for us and his prayers are answered because he prays perfectly on the basis of his perfect sacrifice.

We are GOD's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Ephesians 2:10.

Ephesians 2:1-10 tells us that we are made alive in Christ.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by

nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, GOD, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved. And GOD raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of GOD, not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are GOD's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which GOD prepared in advance for us to do.
In Ephesians 1-2, the Apostle Paul paints a beautiful picture of GOD's wonderful plan of salvation. His original readers (the Ephesian church) were already believers in Jesus, who had received the Holy Spirit but they were at the beginning of their journey and were babes in Christ. Paul prayed that "the eyes of their understanding may be enlightened." Paul longed for them (and us) to be certain of the great power of GOD toward all that believe. Nothing is more vital than that we should be clear about the power of GOD that is manifested in this Christian salvation. Because of GOD's grace, nothing can separate us from Him. Romans 8:35-39.

Ephesians 2:10 says that we are His "handiwork", His masterpiece. Aware of our own failings, it may be hard for us to accept how much He loves us or to believe that we could ever be of value to Him. But GOD doesn't love us because we deserve love; He loves us because He is love. 1 John 4:8. His love is one of grace, and He showed the depth of it when, through Jesus' sacrifice, He made us alive in Him when we were dead in our sins. Ephesians 2:5-8.

GOD's love isn't fickle, it's constant. He loves the imperfect, the broken, those who are weak and those who mess up. When we fall, He's there to lift us up. We're His treasure, and we're so beautiful to Him.

What does it mean to know that "GOD is love"? How can you accept the truth of GOD's endless love for you when you feel undeserving of it?

Psalm 56:3 says, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you."

Notice: it does not say, "I never struggle with fear." Fear strikes, and the battle begins. So, the Bible does not assume that true believers will have no anxieties. Instead, the Bible tells us how to fight when they strike.

The church lives in a hostile world. Within and around her are enemies that not only could destroy her but are meant to and will unless she resists force with yet greater force. The Christian would collapse from sheer external pressure were there not within him a counter pressure sufficiently great to prevent it. The power of the Holy Spirit is therefore not optional but necessary. Without it the children of GOD simply cannot live the life of heaven on earth. The hindrances are too many and too effective.

Today I will commit to remember the acts of GOD in my life and record them for the future.

Thank You, LORD, for our remembrance of days that we had Your blessings and Your deliverance. In Jesus' Holy Name, Amen.

Create in me a pure heart, O GOD. Psalm 51:10.

Give praise to the LORD, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. 1 Chronicles 16:8.

Tell others what Jesus has done for you in your life. Share His goodness with others.

The fact that believers are part of GOD's kingdom doesn't mean they can stop pursuing righteousness. Even though believers have the right to do anything, "not everything is beneficial."

1 Corinthians 10:23).

GOD didn't cover every situation in his Word, telling us what's right and wrong in every circumstance. He did that intentionally, no doubt so that we would search out his heart instead of focusing on his rules.

"Come to me. Let's talk about your life and navigate it together," GOD is saying. These conversations create a heart classroom as GOD, the Teacher, personally instructs us in holiness and about his heart. While it can be frustrating at times because our connection with GOD isn't as clear as it will one day be, that's all a part of the journey. GOD knows that we are chasing after him. And to him, that is the best of intentions.

The only way to know someone is to spend time with them. The only way to discern the voice of another is to hear that person's voice. King David, the author of Psalms was a warrior, king, and businessman. He understood the principle of connecting with GOD in the morning. David's quiet time alone with his LORD allowed him to connect with GOD's love, renew his trust in Him, and hear His directions for his life. Shouldn't you and I do the same? Don't neglect your daily devotional time with your Holy GOD. Don't deprive yourself of this privilege.

Magnify GOD! This is how to do it.

I will praise the name of GOD with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. Psalm 69:30.

There are two kinds of magnifying: microscope magnifying and telescope magnifying. The one makes a small thing look bigger than it is. The other makes a big thing begin to look as big as it really is.

When David says, "I will magnify GOD with thanksgiving," he does not mean: "I will make a small GOD look bigger than he is." He means: "I will make a big GOD begin to look as big as he really is."

We are not called to be microscopes, but telescopes. Christians are not called to be con men who magnify their product out of all proportion to reality, when they know the competitor's product is far superior. There is nothing and nobody superior to GOD. And so, the calling of those who love GOD is to make his greatness begin to look as great as it really is.

The whole duty of the Christian can be summed up like this: feel, think, and act in a way that will make GOD look as great as he really is. Be a telescope for the world of the infinite starry wealth of the glory of GOD.

This is what it means for a Christian to magnify GOD. But you can't magnify what you haven't seen or what you quickly forget.

Therefore, our first task is to see and to remember the greatness and goodness of GOD. So, we pray to GOD, "Open the eyes of my heart," and we preach to our souls, "Soul, forget not all His benefits!"

Jesus was able to see potential in the woman at the well that we could never have sensed. What a gracious thing for us that Jesus Christ never thinks about what we have been! He always thinks about what we are going to be. You and I are slaves to time and space and records and reputations and publicity and things that we call the case history. Jesus Christ cares absolutely nothing about anyone's moral case history. He forgives it and starts from there as though the person had been born one minute before.

Again, I worship You today, almighty GOD for Your matchless grace. No matter what my past, thank You, thank You, thank You that Jesus Christ cares absolutely nothing about anyone's moral case history. Amen.

The grace of GOD has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to unGODliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and GODly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great GOD and SAVIOR, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. <u>Titus 2:11-14.</u>

Titus was one of many young assistants that the apostle Paul had mentored in ministry. In addition to traveling and serving with him, Titus also carried messages back and forth between Paul and the troubled church in Corinth. A gentile who had

come to faith in Christ, Titus eventually was entrusted with leading the work of the gospel in the church of Crete. The theme of grace is a regular one for Paul in many of his letters (see especially Galatians and Ephesians), and it's at the heart of this text: The grace of GOD has appeared that offers salvation to all people. Paul was continually drawing people away from a faith rooted in religious works and focusing instead on GOD's free gift of salvation to us in Christ.

A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense. Proverbs 19:11.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever. Psalm 136:1.

Every believer is a member of the body of Christ; together we are the Messiah's body. The Spirit gives each of us different gifts, and we are to use those gifts to serve the rest of the body.

The fuel behind all of our actions must be love. Believers may do many impressive things with their gifts, but without love those accomplishments are nothing. Certain gifts are needed now, while we "know in part" like the gift of prophecy and the gift of faith, but they won't be needed in heaven when we "know fully." 1 Corinthians 13:2, 12. Love will be ever-present in heaven, and as kingdom citizens, love is the kingdom atmosphere we should be spreading now.

Communion. Every time we eat the bread and drink the cup, it's a declaration. "Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus says. 1 Corinthians 11:24,25. Communion is a proclamation Jesus wants us to make over ourselves: "Jesus died. He died for me. He broke his body for me. He poured out his blood for me."

Who is it a declaration to? To us, we need the reminder that we exist under the covering of Jesus' sacrifice. To any watching unbelievers whose hearts might be stirred by what GOD has done for us. And to any of the forces of darkness: "Jesus died and in him, I am free. You have no authority over me anymore. I am his."

GOD wants us and the watching world to be crystal clear on this fact: We are his.

What is the best present anyone could give you? Besides salvation, what is the greatest thing you've ever received from GOD? Psalm 75:1 is a perfect verse of thanksgiving: "People tell of your wonderful deeds." By telling of GOD's wonderful deeds, we show our thanks and bring him glory. That's the way to show gratitude!

In Psalm 75, the Psalmist celebrates GOD's perfect justice, the fact that good will be rewarded and evil will be punished. He celebrates GOD's power in holding the world together despite all the wickedness in it. He celebrates the fact that those who are arrogant and wicked will one day get what's coming to them. Those are the deeds the Psalmist wanted people to know about. Because his words have survived to this day, we can celebrate with him. If we were to make a list, it probably would look much different than the psalmist's. We might celebrate the good things that have happened at work and school. We might celebrate the way we've grown spiritually at church. We might celebrate our family bond. We might celebrate our friends. We might celebrate our ministry opportunities. It doesn't really matter what we celebrate, only that we praise GOD and share with others the amazing things he has done in our lives. That is what matters.

Dear GOD, we celebrate your goodness in our lives in so many areas. You give us everything we need and more. Amen.

Although they knew GOD, they did not honor him as GOD or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Romans 1:21.

When gratitude springs up in the human heart toward GOD, he is magnified as the wealthy source of our blessing. He is acknowledged as giver and benefactor and therefore as glorious.

But when gratitude does not spring up in our hearts at GOD's great goodness to us, it probably means that we don't want to pay him a compliment; we don't want to magnify him as our benefactor.

And there is a very good reason that human beings by nature do not want to magnify GOD with thanksgiving or glorify him as their benefactor. The reason is that it detracts from their own glory, and all people by nature love their own glory more than the glory of GOD.

At the root of all ingratitude is the love of one's own greatness. For genuine gratitude admits that we are beneficiaries of an unearned bequest. We are cripples leaning on the cross-shaped crutch of Jesus Christ. We are paralytics living minute by minute in the iron lung of GOD's mercy. We are children asleep in heaven's stroller.

Natural man hates to think of himself in these images: unworthy beneficiary, cripple, paralytic, child. They rob him of all his glory by giving it all to GOD.

Therefore, while a man loves his own glory, and prizes his self-sufficiency, and hates to think of himself as sin-sick and helpless, he will never feel any genuine gratitude to the true GOD and so will never magnify GOD, but only himself.

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Mark 2:17.

Jesus has nothing to do for those who insist they are well. He demands something great: that we admit we are not great. This is bad news to the arrogant, but words of honey to those who have given up their charade of self-sufficiency and are seeking GOD.

"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins." Isaiah 43:25.

One of the old German devotional philosophers took the position that GOD loves to forgive big sins more than He does little sins because the bigger the sin, the more glory accrues to Him for his forgiveness. I remember the writer went on to say that not only does GOD forgive sins and enjoy doing it, but as soon as He has forgiven them, He forgets them and trusts the person just as if he or she had never sinned. I share his view that GOD not only forgives great sins as readily as little ones, but once He has

forgiven them He starts anew right there and never brings up the old sins again.

When a person sins and has to be forgiven, the shadow may hang over him or her because it is hard for other people to forget. But when GOD forgives, He begins the new page right there, and then the devil runs up and says, "What about this person's past?" GOD replies: "What past? There is no past. We started out fresh when he came to Me and I forgave him."

LORD, this concept is so foreign to our human understanding and our human way of doing things. Your grace in forgiving and forgetting is beyond our comprehension. But I worship You for it today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

"These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of GOD, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John 20:30–31.

It is sad that very few Christians today are interested in theology. Perhaps this is a reflection on their fervor for Christ. How could anyone truly believe in Jesus and yet have no desire to learn all that they can about Him and His work.

What place does Bible study hold in your life? All of us should be concerned to study Christian doctrines, for in doing so we will be able to present a distinctly Christian world view and be assured that the Jesus whom we trust is the real Jesus. Take time this week to learn about the basics of Christology, perhaps through a teaching series or a book on the person and work of Christ. Strive to make doctrinal study a regular part of your daily life.

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is GOD's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

The overflow of singing praises amid great difficulties has tremendous spiritual power. Paul and Silas set the biblical pattern in the prison in Philippi. Acts 16.

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. Matthew describes a life of service devoted to the "least of these" who are "brothers and sisters of mine." Matthew 25:40.

The idea of serving those in need being a way of serving GOD indirectly is also captured in Proverbs 19:17, which says, "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done."

Since elsewhere in Matthew, Jesus' "family" is defined as those who do the will of my Father in heaven. Matthew here seems focused primarily on the treatment of believers in Jesus who were vulnerable and in need due to taking great risks in service to Him. Since Jesus was sending His followers to do dangerous work on behalf of His kingdom, His words here would have assured them that He was with them in their struggles.

Feeding the hungry is just one way GOD helps us care for His people. It shows our love for Him and relationship with Him. May He help us meet others' needs today.

What acts of kindness can you do today to show GOD's love to others? How are you also caring for Him when you help meet their needs? Gracious GOD, please help me to show Your love through my actions today. In Jesus' Name, Amen

The Apostle Paul speaks of some of the hardships that He experienced for the Gospel of Jesus Christ in 2 Corinthians 6. If you think you have a rough life, READ ON: "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of GOD we commend ourselves in every way. in great endurance, in troubles, hardships and distresses. In beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, hunger and cold. In purity, understanding, patience and kindness. In The Holy Spirit and in sincere love. In truthful speech and in the power of GOD. With weapons of righteousness in the right and in the left. Through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report. Genuine yet regarded as impostors, known yet regarded as unknown, dying and yet we

live on. Beaten and yet not killed, sorrowful yet always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich having nothing and yet possessing everything.

There are fellow Christians in many parts of the world today that suffer unbelievably. Their pain is indescribable. Yet they stand firm in their proclamation of the "Truths of the gospel of Christ." They put their lives on the line moment by moment. Their families are slaughtered, tortured and raped repeatedly. Is your suffering on a level such as this? Let us not take for granted the ease in which we are blessed to live and exist. Remember, not everyone has it as good as you do. Consider these FACTS and you will find that you don't have it so bad after all. Be joyous, happy, thankful and kind to others out of a heart of gratitude.

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them". After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. Are you so dull? Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body. (In saying this, Jesus declared all food clean. He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come. Sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person." Mark 7:14-23.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4:2.

In a world where everything passes away and fails to satisfy, Solomon set himself to answer this question: What is the solution to the problem of life in such a world? The world is one of unending monotony. Solomon felt the meaninglessness of life and the emptiness and uselessness of his own vast works. Even wisdom, which Solomon sought so diligently and prized so highly, was disappointing. The pursuits and pleasures of

humanity in general seemed to him to be merely a chasing after wind. And it was all made worse by the wickedness and cruelties of people. So, what is it that we can do in a world where all is meaningless? Solomon's answer to his question is scattered throughout the book and is summed up at the close: eat, drink, rejoice, do good, live joyfully with your wife, do with full commitment what your hands find to do, and above all, fear GOD, keeping your eyes on the day of final judgment.

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6.

The pursuit of our interest and our happiness is never above GOD's, but always in GOD's. The most precious truth in the Bible is that GOD's greatest interest is to glorify the wealth of his grace by making sinners happy in him.....in him!

When we humble ourselves like little children and put on no airs of self-sufficiency but run happily into the joy of our Father's embrace, the glory of his grace is magnified and the longing of our soul is satisfied. Our interest and his glory are one.

"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins and heal their land. 2 Chronicles 7:14.

LORD, I pray for our country today. We've deteriorated morally so much. I too pray, "Oh GOD, send a revival of repentance and the fear of GOD that will sweep through the continent that we may be spared and that we may honor You!" In Jesus' name, Amen.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs. Heirs of GOD and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. Romans 8:17.

Today I will continue to believe that GOD takes terrible situations and turns them into good.

We are to GOD the pleasing aroma of Christ. 2 Corinthians 2:15.

May our lives produce a scent of Jesus and His love that reminds others of their need of Him.

How can you be "the fragrance of Christ" to someone today? How has your life caused others to sense the presence of the SAVIOR? Dear heavenly Father, help me to pass along an aroma of life that makes others know I represent You.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Philippians 1: 9-10.

In the last days, GOD says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions; your old men will dream dreams. Acts 2:17.

There are times when GOD supernaturally speaks into our lives. He does this to demonstrate His power, His love, and His intimacy with us. Do not be surprised if GOD sends one of His messengers to speak into your life when you need it most. Be open to how GOD might want to speak into your life today.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Psalm 1:3.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to GOD. Philippians 4: 6.

John Calvin wrote, "The Law is kept only when men are just, and kind, and true, towards each other; for in so doing, they testify that they love and fear GOD, and give proper and sufficient evidence of sincere religion." Commitment to justice, mercy, and faithfulness demonstrates commitment to Christ. James 2:

14-26. Therefore, our care for the poor and oppressed must be as evident as our concern for correct Biblical doctrine. What sacrifices are you making to help the poor and marginalized?

Today I will keep on speaking and not be silent trusting the LORD for His protection and blessing. Dear LORD please help me to lose my fearfulness and trust You when I face those who oppose me.

Know this: The LORD longs to be gracious to you. Isaiah 30:18.

In repentance and rest is your salvation found. In quietness and trust is your strength. The LORD is a GOD of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! Rest and trust! Rest and trust!

It's foolish not to trust in GOD!! Don't be foolish. Be wise. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. But always be careful to remember to wait on His timing, not yours. He knows best and only wants the best for you. Cast all your cares upon Him for He cares for you.

Dear GOD, when I am faced with difficult circumstances, please set me free from any sinful patterns in my search to relieve the pain from that circumstance. Please help me to turn to You when I'm tempted and not to seek relief in something else.

The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, yes to the one who seeks him. Lamentations 3:25.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:11-12.

Who is "The angel of the LORD"? An angel of the LORD who is mentioned in Luke 1:11 makes himself and his identity known as Gabriel in Luke 1:19. The angel said to him (Zechariah), "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of GOD, and I have been sent to

speak to you and to tell you this good news." Zechariah was the father of John The Baptist. His wife was named Elizabeth.

In the sixth month of Zechariah's wife Elizabeth's pregnancy, GOD sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph (a descendant of David). The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored. The LORD is with you." Luke 1:26-28.

Be confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6.

Unfortunately, we all sin. But, then when we sincerely confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive us. He will make us pure again. There is nothing that we could possibly do to separate ourselves from the love of GOD. GOD wants us to realize that we sin and he wants us to admit that we need forgiveness. He wants us to admit, confess and ask forgiveness which He will freely give, out of His great love for us.

I must pursue joy in GOD if I am to glorify him as the surpassed valuable reality in the universe. Joy is not a mere option alongside worship. It is an essential component of worship. Freely pursue JOY in GOD. This glorifies Him.

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103:11-12.

Do not let any of the things of the world or past mistakes paralyze your heart!!

I believe there are Christians who have allowed some of their past mistakes to paralyze them. They were so bright and cheerful in their spiritual life once, and then they made some tragic mistake or had something happen to them. They got out

of it somehow, and prayed and wept their way out of it. But it did something to them, and now they cannot seem to lick it. Past wrongs that have been done to them, past failures, times they thought they were going to win and did not, or present sins or discouragement. These things are not mental at all. They are deeper than that; they are subconscious, and they prevent us from believing. Confess those mistakes to un-paralyze your heart and move on in the freedom that only forgiveness can give.

I most urgently exhort you, and I trust GOD Almighty to deliver you; to sponge that out of your spirit; to sponge that out of your heart so you are not hindered by unbelief.

LORD, I'm surely not the only one who desperately needs this reminder today. So many of us struggle with past sins, failures, or hurts. I pray for all of my fellow-servants who need deliverance, who need to have the past sponged out of their spirits and hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evil is ultimately a matter of the heart, for all wickedness originates there. Matthew 5:21-30. Those concerned solely with what others see, not the darkness within, are like a cup whose handle is sparkling but has the coffee from three weeks ago inside. No matter how much you polish that handle, the cup is still dirty.

According to Matthew Henry: "those sins must be seriously abstained from, which the eye of GOD only is a witness to, who searches the heart." We can easily think we are being obedient if we do many good deeds, however doing such things while harboring hatred, jealousy, and other such inward sins is to act as a hypocrite. We are hypocrites if we fail to mortify those things only GOD can see. What inner thoughts and feelings must you put to death?

It is impossible to please GOD without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that GOD exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. Hebrews 11:6.

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4.

The goodness of GOD, the very foundation of worship, is not a thing you pay your respects to out of some kind of disinterested reverence. No, it is something to be enjoyed: "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!" Psalm 34:8.

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth. Psalm 119:103.

As C. S. Lewis says, "GOD in the Psalms is the all-satisfying Object." His people adore him unashamedly for the "exceeding joy" they find in him. Psalm 43:4. He is the source of complete and unending pleasure: "In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Psalm 16:11.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9.

Are you allowing Satan to magnify the memories of your spiritual failures? He will always keep them before you unless you take your stand and move up in faith.

The devil will whisper, "You didn't get very far along toward the deeper life, did you?"

He will say, "You made a big 'to-do' about wanting to be filled with the Spirit and you really flopped, didn't you?"

He will taunt you with the fact that you may have stumbled in the faith, and perhaps more than once! The devil wants you to live in a state of discouraged chagrin and remorse.

Remember, the Bible does not teach that if a man falls down, he can never rise again. The fact that he falls is not the most important thing but rather that he is forgiven and allows GOD to lift him up. Thank You Oh GOD. 1 John 1:9.

Today I will forgive offences against me so GOD will forgive my sins.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4:2.

The foundation for believers' gentleness and grace with each other, Paul explained, is Christ's gracious ways with us. In His incarnation Jesus revealed Himself in the quiet, gentle ways people needed in order to trust and receive Him.

How have you experienced GOD's grace and truth in gentle, indirect ways? How can His gentle ways help you relate to others?

Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. Revelation 22:12.

Praise be to the GOD and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11.

Regarding true riches and wealth, GOD's beautiful creation can so easily become a prison of emptiness if Jesus is not in the center of it. The apostle Paul said there is only one way to find meaning and purpose in life. A truly beautiful life can only be found in Jesus. The Apostle Paul said, " I keep asking that the GOD of our LORD Jesus Christ, the glorious Father may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe. Ephesians 1:17-19.

Knowing Christ brings the only real meaning and purpose to the human soul. Spend time today getting to know the LORD in a more intimate way. Then you will discover real meaning and

purpose in life.

Our GOD is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. Psalm 115:3. The implication of this text is that GOD has the right and power to do whatever makes him happy. That is what it means to say that GOD is sovereign.

The man of an illuminated mind will learn from his mistakes, yes even from his sins. If his heart is trusting and penitent, he can be a better man next year for last year's faults but let him not return again to folly. Repentance should be radical and thorough, and the best repentance for a wrong act is not to do it again.

A famous man of GOD once expressed the highest moral wisdom when he testified that if he stumbled and fell he turned at once to GOD and said, "O LORD, this is what You may expect of me if You leave me to myself." He then accepted forgiveness, thanked GOD and gave himself no further concern about the matter.

Dear precious fellow believers please don't forget to pray for hope and encouragement for Christian prisoners in this world especially those in solitary confinement—in places like Pakistan and Afghanistan. These people are paying an extremely high price for continuing to stand for their belief in Jesus.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. James 1:22-24.

When we read the Scriptures, what do we see in the reflection of our self? Do we recognize ourselves when they describe love and humility? Do we see our own actions when we read what GOD commands us to do? When we look into our hearts and test our actions, Scripture can help us recognize if our actions are in line with what GOD desires for us or if we need to seek repentance and make a change.

The Bible provides us with the map to live wisely according to GOD's plans. As we read it, meditate on it, and digest it, we can ask Him to give us the eyes to see into our heart and the strength to make necessary changes.

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring. Proverbs 27:1.

We can bank on GOD's love because we believe in the absoluteness of his existence, the sovereignty of his freedom, and the limitlessness of his power.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones. Matthew 23:27–28.

Hypocrisy is a dangerous sin because few hypocrites consciously say one thing while doing another. In most cases we ignore the contrast between our words and deeds, keeping ourselves blissfully unaware of how we live inconsistently with our professed beliefs. When this happens we overlook our sins, falling into habitual transgression without even knowing it. Sometimes we are so blind to our misdeeds that we need confrontation in order to see our sin.

Don't you think that we as children of GOD ought to desire to be pure rather than to just appear to be so. Be clean inside as well as out. Truth be told, there is a bit of hypocrisy in all of us. We often try hard to impress other people with our piety, trying to get the pastor and other people to notice our willingness to pray and serve. But are we just as willing to lend a hand to those in need when no one is around to see us? Do we do good even if no one but ourselves and the LORD will know about it? Let us be able to answer both of these questions in the affirmative.

You, GOD, are my GOD, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your

name I will lift up my hands. I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me. Those who want to kill me will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth. They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals. But I will rejoice in GOD; all who swear by GOD will glory in him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced. Psalm 63.

David praised GOD because His "love is better than life". Nothing compares with knowing Him! Through Jesus, GOD has sought us out and made the way for us to come home to His perfect love regardless of how distant we once were. As we turn to Him, we find our heart's true home.

Dear LORD Jesus, thank You for making the way for me to come to You through Your life, death on the cross, and resurrection.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. The joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of GOD. Hebrews 12:2.

Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Isaiah 55:6.

GOD looks at each of us as a fine-tuned instrument. However, we begin as rough wood that He desires to transform into gold. Tuning us requires certain experiences that will stretch our faith, our frame, and our very life. Sainthood springs out of suffering. If we can stand the strain of this intense process, we will come forth as gold-as a sweet-smelling offering to our Maker. When we are in the midst of these times, it feels like fire. It is painful to be stretched beyond our perceived limits, but the LORD knows this is necessary for us to become an instrument that can play a beautiful song that others will seek after.

Let the master Craftsman have His way in your life today. You will be pleased with the instrument He fashions.

"I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." John 17:26.

No greater treasure can be conceived than the Son of GOD.

Moreover, our ability to savor this inexhaustible treasure will not be limited by human weaknesses. We will enjoy the Son of GOD with the very enjoyment of his Father.

GOD's delight in his Son will be in us and it will be ours. And this will never end, because neither the Father nor the Son ever ends. Their love for each other will be our love for them and therefore our loving them will never die.

On the basis of grace as taught in the Word of GOD, when GOD forgives a man, He trusts him as though he had never sinned. GOD did not have mental reservations about any of us when we became His children by faith. When GOD forgives a man, He doesn't think, I will have to watch this fellow because he has a bad record. No, He starts with him again as though he had just been created and as if there had been no past at all! That is the basis of our Christian assurance and GOD wants us to be happy in it. Thank You LORD that Your amazing grace is so real, so available and so free.

The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised. Job 1:21.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 1 Corinthians 9:24.

Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal. Isaiah 26:4.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of GOD, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the LORD." Romans 12:19.

Never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of GOD. What does this mean for you?

Laying down the burden of anger, laying down the practice of nursing your hurt with feelings of being wronged , laying that down does not mean there was no great wrong against you.

It does not mean there is no justice. It does not mean you will not be vindicated. It does not mean they just got away with it. No, It means when you lay down the burden of vengeance, GOD will pick it up.

This is not a subtle way of getting revenge. This is a way of giving vengeance to the one to whom it belongs.

It is taking a deep breath, perhaps for the first time in decades, and feeling like now at last you may be free to love.

Today I will look at the problems of our world through child-like eyes and see the challenges as Jesus sees them.

Thank You, LORD, there is HOPE for even the greatest challenges of our troubled world.

If any of your fellow Israelite's become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you. Do not take interest or any profit from them but fear your GOD so that they may continue to live among you. You must not lend them money at interest or sell them food at a profit. Leviticus 25: 35-37. This example is the way GOD would have us treat one another. Take It to heart and live this philosophy and you will be living as GOD instructs here in Leviticus.

In the Old Testament, the Israelite's were commanded to be generous to their fellow Israelite's Deuteronomy 14:27; 15:7–11 and to foreigners and strangers Leviticus 23:22; and lastly Deuteronomy 26:12. In the New Testament, believers in Jesus were likewise to be generous.

The apostle Paul gave a good example of generosity to fellow believers in 2 Corinthians 8–9. The Macedonian church, despite their extreme poverty and during a severe trial, joyfully gave as much as they could to help the needy believers in Jerusalem.

And Paul urged the Corinthians to willingly do the same, reminding them: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." Today, we're to extend that same generosity inside and outside the church: "Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices GOD is pleased." Hebrews 13:16.

When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. Matthew 6:2.

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from GOD, that we may understand what GOD has freely given us. 1 Corinthians 2:12.

GOD desires for us to know what He has freely given to us. One of the responsibilities of the Holy Spirit is to reveal His plans and purposes to us. They may be hidden for a time, but if we seek Him with our whole heart, we can know what He has given to us.

Once we understand what GOD has given to us, we can walk freely in our calling. However, if we strive to walk in a role that He never gave us, it will result in frustration and failure. GOD wants to reveal His plan to us by His Spirit. This requires a willingness to seek and accept what He gives us. It may be different from what we thought. It may require adjustments to follow His path for our lives. As we learn from the life of John the Baptist, obedience requires death to our own wills.

Ask GOD to reveal what He has freely given to you. Pray that you receive and embrace only those things He has reserved for you to receive and to accomplish in your life. Then you can be assured of a life full of meaning and purpose, and you can look forward to hearing those all-important words someday, "Well done, My good and faithful servant."

Dear GOD, thank you for the way you treat us when we bring our sins to you. Please help us remember that no matter what we've done, we can always receive forgiveness from you. Amen.

Jesus invites us to spend eternity with a happy GOD when he says, "Enter into the joy of your master." Matthew 25:23. Jesus lived and died that his joy , GOD's joy might be in us and our joy might be full. John 15:11;17:13. Therefore the gospel is the gospel of the glory of our happy GOD.

The happiness of GOD is first and foremost a happiness in his Son. Thus, when we share in the happiness of GOD we share in the very pleasure that the Father has in the Son.

This is why Jesus made the Father known to us. At the end of his great prayer in John:17 He said to his Father, "I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them". He made GOD known so that GOD's pleasure in his Son might be in us and become our pleasure.

Christians have fallen into the habit of accepting the noisiest and most notorious among them as the best and the greatest. They too have learned to equate popularity with excellence, and in open defiance of the Sermon on the Mount they have given their approval not to the meek but to the self-assertive; not to the mourner but to the self-assured; not to the pure in heart who see GOD but to the publicity hunter who seeks headlines.

LORD, thank You for all the unknown but faithful pastors serving churches in quiet places. We do place a lot of emphasis on the flashy personalities and big-church leaders. Thank You for the quiet heroes and their faithful service; give them great encouragement today. Amen.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our GOD, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your GOD with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

We must understand that the only one ever to have fully obeyed the command of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is Jesus. None of us, no matter how devoted we are to the Almighty, can live up to this high standard. We can always do more. We can always sacrifice more for His sake. Our failure to love Him as He has

commanded is the reason why we need an atonement. We need the One who has loved GOD with His whole being to plead our case before our Creator. We need Christ to stand between us and the Father. 1 John 2:1-2.

Because Yahweh is one, because He is GOD alone, there can be no service to any other so-called deity.

Devotion to the one, true GOD of Israel means that we must be discerning any time someone uses the word GOD in public. Not everyone who says "GOD bless you" believes in the GOD of Scripture, and so we must take care that they not fool us into thinking otherwise. Let us also not allow people to assume that we worship Islam's GOD or affirm the same doctrine of GOD as Judaism. Non-Christian monotheists do not worship the triune GOD of Scripture.

When we trust GOD, we can exchange our preoccupation on the less important things in life for a devotion to what's most important: His kingdom and his righteousness. We should not worry about the small things but rather, focus on the important things relevant to our GOD.

Do not worry about your life, said Jesus. Matthew 6:25. A simple but beautiful instruction. "Look at the birds of the air," He added. "They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them."

Just as GOD cares for tiny birds, He cares for us. Nurturing us in mind, body, soul, and spirit. It's a magnificent promise. May we look to Him daily without worry.

Dear GOD, it's humbling to know that You care for the needs of my life. Please help me to honor Your promise to provide by trusting You more each day.

I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no SAVIOR. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed. I, and not some

foreign GOD among you. You are my witnesses, declares the LORD, that I am GOD. Isaiah 43:11-12.

Have you ever approached a suffering friend and thought, What can I say? Don't feel that you necessarily have to say anything! Just be with that person. Come alongside and, if need be, sit in silence with them. In the early stages of grief, your silent but supportive presence is one of the best responses to a friend's suffering that you can give.

No eye has seen a GOD besides you, who works for those who wait for him. Isaiah 64:4.

GOD is not served by human hands as though he needed anything, but he himself gives life and breath and everything. Act 17:25.

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. Mark 10:45.

The eyes of the LORD run through the earth, to show himself strong for those who trust him. 2 Chronicles 16:9.

To old age I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. Isaiah 46:4.

I worked harder than any, though it was not I, but the grace of GOD that is with me. 1 Corinthians 15:10.

Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Psalm 127:1.

Whoever serves, let him serve by the strength GOD supplies, so that in everything GOD may be glorified. 1 Peter 4:11.

Work out your own salvation, for it is GOD who works in you, to will and to work. Philippians 2:12-13.

I planted, Apollos watered, but GOD gave the growth.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7.

And hope does not put us to shame, because GOD's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Romans 5:5.

Today I will thank GOD for the gift of His Holy Spirit. I will listen to Him and follow Him.

His divine power has given us everything we need for a GODly life 2 Peter 1:3.

Confirming One's Calling and Election.

His divine power has given us everything we need for a GODly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.
For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control, and to self-control, perseverance, and to perseverance, GODliness, and to GODliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our LORD Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble. 2 Peter 1:3–10.

We might struggle to show self-control when offered something we desire, even if we know it would benefit us more in the future to wait. Yet Peter urged us to "add to our faith" many important virtues, including self-control 2 Peter 1:5–6. Having laid hold of faith in Jesus, Peter encouraged his readers, and us, to continue to grow in goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, GODliness, affection, and love "in increasing measure" as evidence of that faith.

While these virtues don't earn us GOD's favor nor secure our place in heaven, they demonstrate to ourselves as well as to all those with whom we interact, our need to exercise self-control as GOD provides the wisdom and strength to do so. And, best of

all, He's "given us everything we need to live a GODly life," one that pleases Him, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is the LORD your GOD you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. Deuteronomy 13:4.

Jesus, whose home is heaven, gives insight into the ways of GOD's kingdom. These are the ways of life that he wants people to get used to living right now. The teachings are opposite from the ways of the world because the world is broken. Jesus is teaching the right way. Hardships in this broken world push us into deeper knowledge of GOD and his kingdom. Daily, GOD graciously pours out sunshine and rain on people who don't deserve it. We're to love others generously too.

Jesus teaches how to have a conversation with the King of the universe, who invites us to call him "Father." He instructs us to spend time alone with GOD so that we'll be soul-honest, and he gives an example of how we can pray. We can ask our high and holy Father for anything, especially that he'll make earth look more like heaven.

Jesus points out the folly of worry. As much-loved sons and daughters of the universe's King, we shouldn't worry because GOD won't fail in taking care of us.

Jesus' coming to earth was an invasion: He was invading to establish his kingdom, GOD's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, It isn't some far-off place where his followers will someday go. Jesus, the true King, brought his kingdom, his rule and reign to earth. His kingdom is any place where people live under his LORDship. Where his love, joy, peace, goodness, wholeness, justice and kindness are the order of the day. It's GOD's plan that we live in his kingdom now. One day he will usher it in fully, when he sets the world right and joins heaven and earth. But for now, we are to live in our here-but-not-yet home.

The Sermon on the Mount is the King of heaven sitting down among his creations, teaching them about his good home—their home and inviting them to live in it.

Have you ever felt that you were out of favor with GOD? Did you try to ask Jesus into your heart again, and again? Jesus comes the first time! He stays! Be confident that he will never leave you for you are his child.

With our LORD it is a win-win situation. Think about it:

For GOD, praise is the sweet echo of his own excellence in the hearts of his people.

For us, praise is the summit of satisfaction that comes from living in fellowship with GOD.

Dear GOD: Please give me a humble spirit, willing to serve You faithfully, however obscure might be my service. Amen.

For the word of GOD is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from GOD's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12–13.

Scripture presents the most powerful force on the planet, a force that transforms and leads us toward spiritual maturity. Let's open it and read it out loud, asking GOD to ignite our hearts. He promises that the words He's spoken "will not return to Him empty but will accomplish what He desires and achieve the purpose for which He sent it." Isaiah 55:11. Our lives will never be the same.

How has Scripture changed your life? What expectations do you have when you read it? Heavenly Father, thank You for giving me the Bible. Please make it alive in my life.

Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise. Many are the plans in a person's

heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails. Proverbs 19:20-21.

Rejoice in the LORD always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The LORD is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to GOD. And the peace of GOD, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:4–7.

Giving thanks has a way of changing the way we look at life. Thanksgiving can even make us happier.

Father in heaven, where I see my problems arise, please grant me a spirit of gratitude and grateful praise. Those problems and experiences will help me to grow in Christ.

Just as external cleanliness promotes physical health, having "clean hands" before GOD promotes spiritual health. Scrubbing up spiritually involves repentance, confessing our sins, coming clean before GOD so that we can experience spiritual wellbeing. The Psalmist pleaded, "Create in me a pure heart, O GOD, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Psalm 51:10-12.

Confession, in its most elemental form, simply means agreeing with GOD that you've departed from his ways and fallen short of his standards. Admit to him and to yourself that you need a spiritual bath. Be prepared, like a little child, to squirm a little when he reminds you to wash behind your ears. But, oh, the joy of coming clean!

Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, GOD's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

John begins his gospel with the words "In the beginning" the same words used in Genesis when GOD created the world. He wants his readers to know this story is about the Creator working in a new way in the creation he loves so much. Through Jesus, he is once more saying, "Let there be light!"

GOD means for the body of Christ, the church, to experience some of the suffering he experienced so that when we proclaim the Cross as the way to life, people will see the marks of the Cross in us and feel the love of the Cross from us.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12.

LORD, we've lost too much by becoming friendly with the enemy. Help me to be willing to take a stand for righteousness, to choose clearly to be on Your side against the enemy, to pay any price, and then to look forward to laying down my sword later in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14.

A firm grasp of the truths of Scripture informed by GOD's Spirit working in our hearts keeps us from losing our way and helps us make decisions that honor GOD and others. The Bible warns us against wandering from GOD and shows us the way home. It tells us of the priceless love of our SAVIOR and the blessings that await all who place their faith in Him. Scripture is a lifeline! May GOD help us cling to it always.

Jesus has made it very clear to us that man is composed of

body, mind and spirit. We are a complex creation manifesting from the mind of GOD. He is so superior to us and beyond comprehension. Yet, He is so loving that He wants an intimate relationship with each of us. OH, WHAT A WONDERFUL, BEAUTIFUL GOD HE IS! Looking outwardly, He is in and about everything from the infinite eternal outward appearance of the cosmos to the tiniest microscopic, minuscule components of life. It appears that infinity goes outwardly as well is inwardly. Man is only capable of observing and recognizing a small part of that existence. We are limited by the tools at our disposal such as telescopes and microscopes. I am sure there is much that is far beyond our human tools of comprehension. The human mind being the most obvious.

Jesus said to Nicodemus a member of the Jewish Ruling Council, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of GOD unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again."

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

Jesus said, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees." Ezekiel 36:26-27.

According to the Scriptures, GODs precious Holy Spirit exists within us believers. Thus, we are comprised of mind, body, spirit and GODs Spirit. This additional beautiful component within us causes us to be enlightened in our own existence. This is a most beautiful concept that we are privileged to be a part of.

The marvel of this realization is that we are given a choice. A choice! Man has been created with a WILL. Do you understand that by a having a will, we are able to make decisions and direct our own lives in a most fantastic and awesome way. WHAT AN AMAZING GOD WE SERVE.

Please use your GOD given WILL to improve all components of your life starting now. This very day. Do not take this

understanding lightly. It is a gift from GOD himself. He is so good to us. If only we could understand this concept and direct our will in the right ways.

The Apostle John emphasized "eternal life." Just like citizenship in GOD's kingdom, eternal life starts the minute we believe in Jesus. Do you want eternal life? It is yours for the asking. Direct your will to accept and receive this free gift NOW. Don't put it off. You are not guaranteed another day another minute, another second. Think upon this fact. Do not dismiss it lightly.

GOD has called each of us to a unique life that may look totally different from anyone else's life. Once we begin to compare ourselves to others, we begin to live for others and ourselves.

There is only one audience we should be living for, the audience of One. Ask the LORD today if you are living solely for His pleasure.

We cannot achieve for ourselves the completion that was in the mind of the Creator when he brought us into being. We need the hand that will free us and restore us. Jesus, the liberator, strips the chains from our ankles and wrists and makes us free to understand the good news. Jesus has accepted us; now we need to accept his acceptance. To hear the liberating word would be like a deaf person hearing a symphony for the first time. Christianity's most basic truth is that Jesus Christ has already paid for all of our sins. Sins past, sins present, sins future. All we need to do is accept that Jesus died on the cross. That's how Jesus frees us, releasing our sin and removing our guilt. Ultimately all sin is against him. Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, he forgives our sin and removes our guilt and frees us to live again.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. Matthew 5:11–12.

One way of rejoicing when we are suffering (and we all suffer from time to time) comes from fixing our minds firmly on the greatness of the reward that will come to us in the resurrection. The effect of this kind of focus is to make our present pain seem small in comparison to what is coming: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. In making the suffering tolerable, rejoicing over our reward will also make love possible.

Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great. Luke 6:35. Be generous with the poor and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. Luke 14:14.

Another way of rejoicing in suffering comes from the effects of suffering on our assurance of hope. Joy in affliction is rooted in the hope of resurrection, but our experience of suffering also deepens the root of that hope.

For example, Paul says, "We exult in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces proven genuineness, and genuineness produces hope." Romans 5:3–4.

Here, Paul's joy is not merely rooted in his great reward, but in the effect of suffering to solidify his hope in that reward. Afflictions produce endurance, and endurance produces a sense that our faith is real and genuine, and that strengthens our hope that we will indeed gain Christ.

Let's look at an important subject. "The whole armor of GOD." It represents the defense we must take in our spiritual lives. And as I'm sure you are aware; we need to defend ourselves.

I believe this subject is so important that we need to take time to study it carefully. Remember, what the Bible says, "study to show yourselves approved." 2 Timothy 2:15.

The Bible tells us that we are fighting a war against Satan, who seeks to destroy us. Therefore, we must act and put on GOD's armor. As Christians, it is important for us to understand the severity of this battle.

Therefore, take up the whole armor of GOD, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Ephesians 6:13. So, what is the whole armor of GOD? The following is what The Holy Bible says about the whole armor of GOD: Read this carefully and apply it to yourself daily to defend yourself in this great spiritual battle that we find ourselves in.

What are the 7 pieces of the armor of GOD?

- **The Belt of Truth**
- **The Breastplate of Righteousness**
- **The Gospel of Peace**
- **The Shield of Faith**
- **The Helmet of Salvation**
- **The Sword of the Spirit**
- **Prayer**

1. The belt of Truth.

In Ephesians 6:14, we are told how to apply the belt of truth. This truth, as explained in John 4:6 Jesus saith unto him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me."

No matter how much we desire to know GOD and live by His Word, we cannot do this without having a personal relationship with Jesus. He is the Truth...the first piece of the armor of GOD.

Think about what a belt does. A belt pretty much holds us together, keeping our clothes where we want them to be, allowing us to carry things with us that we might need. In some situations, we would be a complete mess without a belt.

Imagine wearing clothes that are too loose and going through your day without a belt to hold them up. You would be exhausted by the end of the day because too much energy would have been spent on doing the job a belt easily could have done for you.

When we don't acknowledge Jesus as our Truth, we are attempting to take on a responsibility that was never meant to be ours. Putting on the Belt of Truth allows us to keep the rest of our armor in place because Jesus, the Truth, is the most important piece of our armor.

2. The Breastplate of Righteousness

In Ephesians 6:14 we are instructed to wear the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness means right living, an element of goodness that we are simply not capable of on our own.

A breastplate covers our heart, the very source of our happiness and our pain. When our emotions rule us, we tend to lack peace because we are looking for outside sources to give us what they cannot.

Wearing that breastplate protects us, keeping our heart focused on Jesus, the only source of goodness we can experience. And thereby keeps us walking in GOD's will, living out His righteousness.

3. The Gospel of Peace

In Ephesians 6:15 it tells us about an important piece of our armor, our shoes. These coverings for our feet are being prepared with the Gospel, our source of peace.

Without shoes, we wouldn't get very far, especially if the ground we walk on is anything less than perfect. And, since ground is subject to the elements, there will always be something to potentially harm us or trip us.

Shoes protect our feet. They also allow us to go places that otherwise would be too dangerous for us to travel.

The Word of GOD, the shoes that will protect us from the devil while also giving us what we need to share Jesus with others, will keep us from going to the wrong places and protect us from

pain that may come our way when we tread where we shouldn't go. By spending time in GOD's Word, we hide in our heart what we need to help us to not sin against Him, as we are told to do in Psalm 119:11.

By wearing the shoes of the armor of GOD, we also open ourselves up to follow the perfect map of GOD's Word, letting us know exactly where we need to go to help others.

4. The Shield of Faith

In Ephesians 6:16 GOD shares with us the shield of faith. We carry a shield in our hand. It is a defense weapon; one we need to protect us from the weapons thrust toward us from others. It can be moved, allowing protection to every part of our bodies.

We are told that the devil will send fiery darts our way. By simply having faith, we can fight the evil of these arrows.

We are told in Hebrews 11:6 that "without faith it is impossible to please GOD". We have the ability to exercise our faith which helps us to raise the shield to protect us from every temptation the devil throws our way.

5. The Helmet of Salvation

Ephesians 6:17 reminds us of our helmet of salvation.

Our mind needs protection. Our thoughts can take us places we don't need to go. Our mind also can, when saturated in the Word of GOD, remind us of the truth, protect us from lies hurled at us.

The helmet of salvation is a gift we are given when we put our trust in Jesus, accepting everything He did to save us from our sins and give us eternal life

6. The Sword of the Spirit

Ephesians 6:17 tells us about the sword of the spirit which is GOD's Word. When you are in any kind of battle, you need a weapon. Without one, it isn't possible to fight someone who does have one. And the devil definitely has weapons. Yet, his

weapons cannot even come close to the sword we Christians are given when we are born again. However, it's a weapon we have to choose to pick up, though; it's no good to us if it isn't used.

7. Prayer

The final piece of the armor of GOD mentioned in is prayer. It is a weapon we can pull out at any time.

Ephesians 6:18 says, It is a weapon that Jesus Himself used. We are told throughout the Gospels how Jesus went away to pray to the Father, setting an example for us to follow.

The Bible tells us there will be times when we don't know what to pray. GOD took care of that for us by giving us His Holy Spirit who can pray for us. In Romans 8:26, we learn that "the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Through fervent prayer, we not only get the protection we need, but we also gain strength to fight the devil's fiery darts and live for our SAVIOR.

Aren't you glad you took time to study this important subject?

And now, moving on.

We really are paralyzed without Christ. We are capable of no good. As Paul says in Romans 7:18, "Nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh."

But according to John 15:5, GOD intends for us to do something good, namely, bear fruit. So, as our strong and reliable friend "I have called you friends." John 15:15. He promises to do for us what we can't do for ourselves.

How then do we glorify him? Jesus gives the answer in John 15:7: "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." We pray! We ask GOD to do for us through Christ what we can't do for ourselves namely, bear fruit.

So, how is GOD glorified by prayer? Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. And prayer is the turning away from ourselves to GOD in the confidence that he will provide the help we need.

The fact that one of the Twelve Disciples was able to turn His back on Jesus tells us there will be no perfect church this side of heaven. After all, if one who saw Jesus with his own eyes was able to betray Him, we cannot be surprised when professing believers who have not seen Jesus betray Him. Judas' betrayal warns us that even those who seem closest to the LORD may not really love Him, and it encourages us to beware of sin lest we also go astray. Heb. 12:14–17.

Judas' betrayal of the SAVIOR is the most wicked deed ever committed. It warns us to be careful lest sin take hold of our hearts and make us turn our backs on Christ. Those who truly know Jesus will not finally betray Him, but it is possible even for Christians to become disenchanted with the way GOD works out His plan and fall into transgression. Let us take care to remember that we have no right to call the LORD's way of doing things into question.

Any serious-minded Christian may at some time find himself wondering whether the service he is giving to GOD is the best it could be. He may even have times of doubting, and fear that his toil is fruitless and his life empty.

The church has marked out certain work and approved it as service acceptable to GOD, and for the most part the church has been right. But it should be kept in mind that it is not the kind or quantity of work that makes it true service-it is the quality.

Before the judgment seat of Christ, very little will be heard of numbers or size; moral quality is about all that will matter then.

It would be a shock to most of us to learn just what GOD thinks of our breathless activity, and a greater shock to many to find out the true quality of our service as GOD sees it. For not all religious activity is accepted of GOD, not even when it appears to produce results and get things done. The LORD sees not as man sees.

In Christian service motive is everything, for it is motive that gives to every moral act its final quality.

LORD, I need the reminder that before the judgment seat of Christ, very little will be heard of numbers or size; moral quality

is about all that will matter then. Please help me to serve today with that in mind. Amen.

Perhaps the best way to impress doctrine upon our hearts and minds is through the singing of songs. Therefore, we should think carefully about the lyrics of the hymns that we sing in our churches. Today, pick out a favorite hymn from your favorite hymnal. Consider the meaning of the lyrics and try to find the biblical passages upon which they are based. When you have the opportunity to sing unto the LORD, pay close attention to the meaning of words being sung.

And the GOD of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 1 Peter 5:10.

Though I also do not know what the future holds, I will trust in Him who holds the future!

A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by. Psalm 90:4.

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep.
My sheep listen to my voice. John 10:27.
"Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger, in fact they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. Jesus used this figure of speech but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.
Jesus is the Good Shepherd who "lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11.

In a world of panic, are we listening to chaos or to Christ? Indeed, "my sheep listen to my voice," He said. "I know them, and they follow me". Jesus "used this figure of speech" to explain Himself to doubting religious leaders. As with a good shepherd, He said that "his sheep follow him because they know his voice."

<u>If we are wise we will LISTEN TO HIS VOICE.</u> Be very careful which voices you listen to each day. Practice careful listening.

Dear Heavenly Father, in a noisy world, when You speak to my heart, mind, and spirit in and through the Scriptures, may I hear You over and above all else.

Put on then, as GOD's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the LORD has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <u>Colossians 3:12.</u>

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what GOD's will is, His good, pleasing and perfect will. <u>Romans 12:2.</u>

What audience do you play to? Each day you are seen by many who will make a judgment about the way you handle yourself among different audiences. Politicians have learned to play to their audiences, customizing messages for the needs of their particular groups. Musicians have learned to play to their audiences. Pastors play to their congregations each Sunday morning. Workplace believers play to the audiences who will buy their product.

Christ has called us to play to one audience, the audience of Himself. When you seek to please any other audience in your life, you become susceptible to situational ethics and motivations based on the need for the moment. Your audience becomes a pawn in your hands because you know what they want. Is that wrong? Sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't.

Pure obedience to pleasing GOD in our lives will often meet the needs of those around us. It is GOD's will that you and I love one another, provide good services to our customers, and look to the

interests of others before ourselves. This will result in meeting many needs of the audiences in our lives.

However, there are other times when our audiences are asking for something contrary to GOD's will. Politicians are often forced to appease their audiences, even though it may go against GOD's laws. When we are asked to go with the flow, we discover which audience is most important in our lives. Is it the audience of One, or the audience of many?

Today, be aware of which audience you are playing to. Ask yourself why you are taking a particular action. Is it to please the audience of One? Or is it to please the audience of others who might negatively impact you should you not play to their tune?

The next time you are hurt by someone, realize the gravity of the crossroads where you find yourself. Choose grace instead of bitterness. Then you will be free to move past the hurt, and a root of bitterness will not be given opportunity to grow.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, Hebrews 12:1-2.

Is Satan giving you a hard time in your life of faith-in the Christian race you are running? Expect it if you are a believing child of GOD!

Satan hates your GOD. He hates Jesus Christ. He hates your faith. You should be aware of the devil's evil intentions. He wants you to lose the victor's crown in the race you have entered by faith through grace.

When by faith we have entered this lifelong spiritual course, the Holy Spirit whispers, “Do you truly want to be among the victors in this discipline?” When we breathe our "Yes! Yes!" He whispers of ways that will aid us and carry us to certain victory.

The Spirit tells us to throw off everything that would hinder us in the race. He tells us to be aware of the little sins and errors that could divert us from the will of GOD as we run. But here is the important thing: He tells us to keep our eyes on Jesus,

because He alone is our pacesetter and victorious example. Paul had a vision from GOD regarding Heaven. It went like this: "I must go on boasting, although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on boasting. I will go on to visions and revelations from the LORD. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know, but GOD knows. He was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that but I will not boast about myself except my weaknesses. For when I am weakest, I am strong in Jesus Christ depending on Him for strength."

Paul had a glimpse of the glory of heaven and was determined that he would, by the grace of Christ, get there, with as many others as he could possibly persuade to come along.

2nd Corinth.12 is one of the fullest statements of Paul's own, personal hope of heaven, where our citizenship is. We are strangers here; our homeland is there. Our walk is here; our hearts are there.

Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave. Matthew 20: 26-27.

The essence of this teaching is that true greatness lies in character, not in ability or position. Men in their blindness have always thought that superior talents made a man great, and so the vast majority believe today. To be endowed with unusual abilities in the field of art or literature or music or statecraft, for instance, is thought to be in itself an evidence of greatness, and the man possessing these talents is hailed as a great man. Christ taught, and by His life demonstrated, that greatness lies deeper.

While a few philosophers and religious folks in pre-Christian times had seen the fallacy in man's idea of greatness and had exposed it, it was Christ who located true greatness and showed how it could be attained. "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you,

let him be your servant." It is that simple and that easy and that difficult.

LORD, this truth is indeed contrary to the philosophy of the world which the church has unfortunately bought into. Stimulate my heart to desire this true greatness for Your glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

We are not perfectly holy and have no inherent right to execute wrath. How then can we take pleasure in the death of the sinner if GOD finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked? Our hearts should be broken, not gleeful, when we see someone destroy himself on account of his evil. As you lament the moral degeneracy of our culture, can others hear sadness in your voice? Are you grieved when the unrighteous remain unrepentant?

So, in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. Romans 12:5.

The Church is the body of Christ. We have to help each other to share the love of Jesus as He has shown us. Today I will share my GOD given gifts with others and help build up the body of Christ.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the unGODly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But GOD demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from GOD's wrath through him! For if, while we were GOD's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life? Not only is this so, but we also boast in GOD through our LORD Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Romans 5:6–11.

In Romans 5 the apostle Paul sets up one of the most beautiful pictures of Jesus' work on the cross. Shortly after saying that GOD proved His love for humanity through Christ's death, Paul turns his attention to our death. Death, he says, became a plague over all humanity because the first Adam chose rebellion over obedience. As a result, every human dies. But Jesus, the last Adam chose obedience to the Father. As a result, He opened the path through death to eternal life for everyone who will believe in Him.

We were GOD's enemies when He sent Jesus. We were doomed to die because of Adam's and our own rebellion. But GOD didn't give up on us. Instead, He showed us love through Jesus. And His faithfulness broke both the power of sin and death, leading us back to life. This demonstrates real true deep genuine love !! Always remember "GOD IS LOVE."

John 3:16 assures us of GOD's love. He gave His Son, Jesus, to die on our behalf so that if we believe in Him, we'll receive eternal life. But what if we fail Him even after we place our trust in Him? That's when we need to remember that "Christ died for us" even when we were still sinners. Romans 5:8. If He could love us at our worst, how can we doubt His love today when we're His children?

When we sin, our Father lovingly corrects and disciplines us. That's not rejection; that's love. Hebrews 12:6. Let's live as GOD's beloved children, resting in the blessed assurance that His love for us is steadfast and everlasting.

How does understanding GOD's love for you strengthen you to obey Him? How does it impact your view of sin?

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Luke 6:35.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what GOD's will is. His good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2.

Our needs are obvious to the all-knowing One. But our good GOD values our asking too. He loves the intimacy that grows when we tell him what we need and ask him for it. He delights in responding. And he delights in the closeness that develops when we realize that he has, indeed, heard and answered us.

The Bible is unlike any other book. It is GOD's story, full of amazing depth and application for our lives. Jesus reminds us that the condition of our heart is important when we hear or read GOD's Word. If we are open and receptive to GOD's words, they will take root in our lives and transform us. But how does our heart open up to GOD in order to be receptive to his words? Jesus told his disciples that after he returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit would come to reside in them and to remind them of everything he had said. This same Spirit lives in all believers today.

The desired outcome of studying GOD's truth is transformation. It guides us along a path of maturity in Christ. We get into the Bible and the Bible turns around and gets into us and changes us for the good. Hebrews 5:11-6:3.

For the word of GOD is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12.

We should study the Bible to know GOD and his truth and to find direction for our daily life.

When we regularly read and study GOD's Word. We come to see that studying GOD's Word in community with other believers is of great value. We align our lives to the Bible because we believe it is from GOD.

Consider this: What if for one week you exchanged your mobile phone for your Bible? Anywhere you normally take your phone, you take your Bible instead. Anytime you normally look at your phone, you look at GOD's Word instead. The time you spend calling, texting, and browsing online with your phone is traded for time reading Scripture. If you normally place your phone next to you at a business meeting or by your plate at dinnertime, you now put your Bible there. What difference would this exchange make in your life in just one week? Whose life would be impacted? This line of questions is not intended to trigger guilt, but rather to inspire us to increase our engagement with the one instrument that can truly change not only our lives but the lives of those around us.

Consider this: We are called servants and that no doubt means we are to do exactly as we are told. But the wonder of this picture is that the "master insists on "serving" even in the age to come when he appears in all his glory "with his mighty angels in flaming fire." 2 Thessalonians 1:7–8. But why is this?

Because the very heart of his glory is the fullness of grace that overflows in kindness to needy people. Therefore, he aims "in the coming ages to show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:7.

What is the greatness of our GOD? What is his uniqueness in the world? Isaiah answers: "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a GOD besides Him, who works for those who wait for him." Isaiah 64:4.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. Psalm 139:14.

How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no GOD but you, as we have heard with our own ears. 2 Samuel 7:22.

In seasons of waiting as we go through various circumstances when it seems like nothing is happening. GOD hasn't forgotten us. As the Holy Spirit helps us to develop patience, we can know that He's the Hope Giver, the Promise Keeper, and the One who controls the future.

May these words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14.

Before GOD said, "Let there be light!" he knew that Jesus would be crucified. That means that the Son knew too and he chose to come to earth anyway. And he chose to stay on the altar. Because He is just that good.

As Jesus took on the sin of the world, the earth physically responded to the weight of what was happening. The sky darkened and the earth shook.

Whenever we stand on the mountain, we are able to see clearly. It is the best vantage point to see what lies ahead. Wouldn't it be great to live on the mountain all the time in order to anticipate what is ahead? GOD allows us to experience the mountaintop at times.

Think on this: None of us really derive the character qualities GOD desires for our lives while we are on the mountain. It is in the valley where the fruit is planted and harvested. It cannot grow on the mountain; it must grow in the valley. GOD is a GOD of the mountain, but he is even more a GOD of the valley.

In the valley, it is more difficult to see ahead; the clouds often cover the valley and limit our sight. Joseph was thrust into a deep valley that left him wondering if the GOD of his father had forsaken him. Jesus hoped that He might be able to avoid the valley that caused Him to sweat blood. There is a valley that each of us must enter, usually unwillingly, in order to experience the GOD of the valley-and to experience His faithfulness in the valley. Once we have spent time in this valley, we come out with something we would have never gained if we had not entered it.

The valley brings much fruit into our lives so that we might plant seeds into the lives of others. GOD does not waste valley experiences. If we are faithful in the valley, we will enter a new

dimension with GOD that we never thought possible. There is a harvest of wisdom and virtue that can only be grown in the valley.

Has GOD brought you into the valley? Know that the valley is a place of fruitfulness; it is a place of testing. It is where GOD brings what you know in your head into your heart. The only value of knowledge is when it becomes part of your heart. Look for GOD in the valley today.

Our daily lives present us with ample opportunity to choose GOD's leading or to reject it. Saul chose to disobey, and it cost him the kingdom. Jesus chose to obey, and he gained the keys to the kingdom of heaven. The only "but" believers should utter is the one Christ taught us to pray, "Not as I will, but as you will." Matthew 26:39.

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." John 15:7.

Prayer pursues joy in fellowship with Jesus and in the power to share his life with others.

And prayer pursues GOD's glory by treating him as the inexhaustible reservoir of hope and help. In prayer, we admit our poverty and GOD's prosperity, our bankruptcy and his bounty, our misery and his mercy.

Therefore, prayer highly exalts and glorifies GOD precisely by pursuing everything we long for in him, and not in ourselves. "Ask, and you will receive . . . that the Father may be glorified in the Son and . . . that your joy may be full." Unless I'm badly mistaken, one of the main reasons so many of GOD's children don't have a significant life of prayer is not so much that we don't want to, but that we don't plan to.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of GOD. John 1:10-12.

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. John 14:20.

Dear reader, please take time to meditate on this beautiful passage of scripture and take it very personally:

"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans." John 14:15-18.

Jesus said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me." John 14:23-24.

We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 1John 2:1.

No matter how you picture it, we have Christ living inside us, guiding us and helping us to grow to be more like Him.

Dear Jesus, You're GOD and man. Thank You for giving of Yourself so sacrificially, that I might be called a child of GOD.

Do not throw away your confidence in Jesus, it will be richly rewarded. Hebrews 10:35.

Christ has given you all things in Him. He has a unique plan for you that cannot be compared to another. He alone is your security. Trust in the purposes He has for your life and remember, "My GOD shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19.

As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children. Psalm 103:15-17.
We who follow Christ are men and women of eternity. We must put no confidence in the passing scenes of the disappearing world. We must resist every attempt of Satan to palm off upon us the values that belong to mortality. Nothing less than forever is long enough for us. We view with amused sadness the frenetic scramble of the world to gain a brief moment in the sun. "The book of the month," for instance, has a strange sound to one who has dwelt with GOD and taken his values from the Ancient of Days. "The man of the year" cannot impress those men and women who are making their plans for that long eternity when days and years have passed away and time is no more.

You, my brothers and sisters were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Galatians 5:13-14.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45.

After bringing us into His family through faith in His Son, the LORD sets His sights on building into us the same qualities that made Jesus distinct, a servant's heart and a giving spirit. It's so easy to lose sight of our primary calling as Christians. Even those who lead must do so with an attitude of genuine humility and an authentic desire to help others.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. Ephesians 1:18.

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9.

This is GOD's universal purpose for all Christian suffering: more contentment in GOD and less satisfaction in self and the world.

I have never heard anyone say, "The really deep lessons of life have come through times of ease and comfort."

But I have heard Christians that I respected say, "Every significant advance I have ever made in grasping the depths of GOD's love and growing deep with him has come through suffering." The pearl of greatest price is the glory of Christ.

Paul pointed out that in our sufferings the glory of Christ's all-sufficient grace is magnified. If we rely on him in our calamity and he sustains our "rejoicing in hope," then he is shown to be the all-satisfying GOD of grace and strength that he is.

If we hold fast to him "when all around our soul gives way," then we show that he is more to be desired than all we have lost.

Christ said to the suffering apostle, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul responded to this: "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9–10.

So, suffering clearly is designed by GOD not only as a way to wean Christians off of self and onto grace, but also as a way to spotlight that grace and make it shine. That is precisely what faith does; it magnifies Christ's future grace.

The deep things of life in GOD are discovered in suffering.

Let us acknowledge that the word "suffering" has some negative connotations associated with it. But if we read the Bible carefully about this subject it can change our perspective. Take the time to study this subject and you will discover some things that you may never have realized. Some of the most powerful learnings in life can be both the most difficult and the most rewarding.

Ask GOD to give you a servant's heart, to serve him with gratitude. Gratitude is something that will bring you closer to our LORD. Don't make the mistake of taking things for granted.

Take the time to count your blessings and you will find that you have much to be thankful for.

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 1 Peter 4:12-13.

There are two spirits in the earth, the Spirit of GOD and the spirit of Satan, and these are at eternal enmity. The ostensible cause of religious hatred may be almost anything; the true cause is nearly always the same. The ancient animosity which Satan, since the time of his inglorious fall, has always felt toward GOD and His kingdom. Satan is aflame with desire for unlimited dominion over the human family; and whenever that evil ambition is challenged by the Spirit of GOD, he invariably retaliates with savage fury.

It is possible within the provisions of redemptive grace to enter into a state of union with Christ so perfect that the world will instinctively react toward us exactly as it did toward Him in the days of His flesh.

It is the Spirit of Christ in us that will draw Satan's fire. The people of the world will not much care what we believe and they will stare vacantly at our religious forms, but there is one thing they will never forgive us, the presence of GOD's Spirit in our hearts. They may not know the cause of that strange feeling of antagonism which rises within them, but it will be nonetheless real and dangerous. Satan will never cease to make war on the soul in which dwells the Spirit of Christ which continues to be the target for his attacks.

But LORD thank You for victory through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Here is a precious jewel for you to carry in your pocket today and everyday if you will, "in the end "WE WIN". This is a promise from The Most Powerful King Himself in the HOLY BIBLE. Rejoice !!!

Think upon this for a moment. "The Passover." This provides a theological framework for understanding the significance of the Messiah's death. Just as the angel of death passed over all of those who were covered by the blood of the lamb Exodus 12 so too will the blood of the Lamb "slain from the foundation of the world" Revelation 13:8 shield those whom it covers from eternal destruction.

Ask yourself today whose judgment you fear. GOD or Men? Endeavor to care not primarily what men think but to be first and foremost concerned with fearing the LORD.

As Christians we should not be afraid of a human; they can just kill the body but cannot hurt the soul. Jesus would be the one who's power we should fear. He will be able to punish our soul too. We should hold onto our faith. We should never betray our faith. Without Jesus, what does the life in this world or the afterlife mean? Nothing!

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising GOD and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the LORD added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47.

GOD's people are designed to help each other. The gospel writer Luke described believers in Jesus as "devoted" to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship." Acts 2:42. When we combine our resources, we can work together to help those in need like the first believers in Jesus did. As we grow closer to GOD and each other, we can care for one another. Witnessing GOD's love

demonstrated through His people's actions can lead others to a saving relationship with Jesus.

We can serve others with a smile or a kind deed. We can offer a financial gift or a prayer. As GOD works in and through us, we're simply better together.

Loving Father, please help me see those in need and serve You by serving others. In Jesus' name, Amen

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1.

Today I should look for ways to serve others in genuine humility as a disciple of Jesus Christ. LORD, help me to love as You did, serve others as You did and give of myself as You did!

LORD GOD Almighty, Creator of Light, we praise You for dispelling the darkness of this world opening our eyes to You and Your presence in our lives.

Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD. Psalm 27:14.

When four men brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus, he first forgives him of his sins. The Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy. He is demonstrating His authority over both the physical and spiritual realm when Jesus heals the man (physical) and forgives his sins (spiritual). He is LORD of both realms.

Everywhere Jesus goes, demons react violently to him. They know who Jesus is and what he has come to do. The kingdom of light is invading the kingdom of darkness, and the darkness doesn't like it one bit.

This is what the LORD says, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your GOD, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go." Isaiah 48:17.

Our Holy GOD who is committed to teaching His children in the way they should go. What is the real benefit of His teaching? "If only you had paid attention to My commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea." Isaiah 48:18. The LORD tells us that the benefit of allowing GOD to teach us and lead us in the way is peace and righteousness. This is a guaranteed promise from GOD.

This is GOD's immutable guarantee: You will have peace like a river and righteousness like the waves of the sea! What a great promise!

Are you trusting GOD with the very details of your life so that He can lead you in the way you should go? Are you allowing Him to teach you? Seek the LORD today for what He wants to teach you and allow Him to lead you, and you will ensure peace and righteousness in your life.

If we will only listen and obey GOD He will bring peace and righteousness in our life. Shouldn't we desire that kind of life?

Sometimes we sin without meaning to. We aim for righteousness, honor and wisdom, but we miss by a mile. Leviticus 4:2 introduces a Hebrew word for sin that means "to miss the mark." George R. Knight, professor of church history at Andrews University Theological Seminary (Berrien Springs, Michigan), explains, "You have missed, not because you are wicked, but because you are stupid, silly, careless, inattentive, perhaps lazy, or more probably because you do not possess the proper aim in life." Add to that Hebrew word for sin the word "unintentionally," and it suggests someone wandering away like a silly sheep or someone who isn't thinking. We sometimes feel we ought to be given a break if we didn't really mean to sin. But the Bible doesn't cut us any slack. Whether we mean it or not, sin damages our relationship with GOD and with others.

Jesus is the complete sacrifice for sin. Sin is terrible even when it's unintentional. Praise GOD that Christ's death provides forgiveness for us and that his indwelling Spirit gives us the strength to aim straight at GODliness.

There are three levels of how to live with <u>our things</u>: (1) you can steal to get; (2) or you can work to get; (3) or you can work to get in order to give.

Too many professing Christians live on level two. Almost all the forces of our culture urge them to live on level two. But the Bible pushes us relentlessly to level three. "GOD is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." <u>2 Corinthians 9:8.</u>

Why does GOD bless us with abundance? So, we can have enough to live on, and then use the rest for all manner of good works that alleviate spiritual and physical misery. <u>Enough for us; abundance for others.</u>

The issue is not how much a person makes. Big industry and big salaries are a fact of our times, and they are not necessarily evil. The evil is in being deceived into thinking a six-digit salary must be accompanied by a six-digit lifestyle.

GOD has made us to be conduits of his grace. The danger is in thinking the conduit should be lined with gold. It shouldn't. Copper will do. Copper can carry unbelievable riches to others.

The gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. <u>Matthew 24:9–14.</u>

No temptation (difficult situation) has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And GOD is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. <u>1 Corinthians 10:13.</u> This is a scripture passage that many use in mentoring new believers. The New International Version of the Bible footnotes this verse with the reminder that in the Greek language the word "temptation" or "tempted" can also mean "trial" or "testing. So, to further clarify this verse, it means that whatever temptation and/or difficult circumstance we may find ourselves in, others have been there before (we aren't the first) and GOD will make a way for us to deal with it if we will only seek and obey His guidance. Here is the <u>secret formula for dealing with things:</u> 1. Recognize the issue. 2. Seek

GODly guidance. 3. Obey that guidance. This is the scriptural way to deal with "things" in our life. It will bring solution and maturity as we practice this formula consistently.

The world may be full of human suffering but it is more full of GOD's beauty and grace. Sometimes it is harder to see when we are in difficult circumstances but we should always endure and be sure of it.

In all the troubles Paul encountered in service to Christ 2 Corinthians 11:16–33; 12:8–9), he could look back and see, in his weakness, a grace and goodness beyond words and wonder. Sometimes words are simply not enough in regard to describing "a grace and goodness beyond words and wonder".

What problem have you had that seemed like a curse? How have you seen GOD show Himself good to you in ways you can't describe? Father in heaven, please give me the courage today to look for an inexpressible sense of Your presence and strength in my weakness.

Again, and I think this bears repeating. On a more personal level, I have seen GOD show Himself and His goodness to me on many occasions when it looked like there was no way out for me and things appeared utterly hopeless. However, I recognized my dire situations, turned to Him for help that I so severely needed, and found Him to be there. Faithful and true are the only words that come to mind for me. You may not fully understand what I have described here. You would have to have BEEN THERE to understand. You will just have to take my word for it. What I have told you here is TRUE !!! Believe it. He is no respecter of persons. He will be there for you too when you need Him if you will only ask. Praise GOD for this FACT.

The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. 1 Corinthians 3:8.

Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4.

Jesus was so approachable that not a single person was afraid to come to him. The demon-possessed man fell at his feet. The hemorrhaging woman touched his cloak. The Siro-Phoenician woman outside of the Jewish family begged for his help. The cast-aside, the overlooked, the contagiously sick, the despicable, they all came to him. And Jesus welcomed them all.

And while some people hated him John 15:18-25 or didn't understand who he was Matthew 13:53-58, not a single person came to him fearing that they would be rejected. Not one. Even the "greatest" of sinners; prostitutes, thieves, criminals given the death sentence came to Jesus. He was so inviting that everyone knew he wouldn't turn them away.

That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. John 17:21.

What is the greatest power that allows the unsaved to make a decision for Jesus Christ? It isn't prayer, though this is important. It isn't good deeds, though deeds indicate a fruitful relationship with GOD. It isn't good behavior, though Christ commands us to be obedient as sons. The greatest power GOD's children have over darkness is unity. Jesus talked a great deal about His oneness with the Father and the importance of unity in the Body of Christ. It is the most difficult command Jesus gave to the Church, because it wars against the most evil aspect of our sin nature-independence.

Jesus prayed that we all might be one, as the Father and He are one. He wanted the same love GOD has for Jesus to be in each of us. When this love is in us, we are drawn to each other with a common mission. The walls fall down. The independent spirit is broken. Competition is destroyed. Satan's accusations are thwarted. Our love for each other is manifest to the world around us. Lost souls begin to seek this love that is so foreign to them.

Jesus does not want a dirty and unholy wife (The church body of believers). Therefore, he was willing to die to "sanctify and cleanse" his betrothed so he could present to himself a wife "in

splendor." He gained the desire of his heart by giving himself up for the good of his bride.

As we wait for Jesus' return, we may face tough times. But we'll always have reasons to rejoice in every day GOD has made. Almighty GOD, thank You for giving me so many reasons to rejoice as I celebrate who You are, what You've done, and all You've promised to do.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Psalm 51:12.

Jesus used parables to communicate principles of the Kingdom of GOD. He said each believer's life should have the same impact on his or her world as salt has on food. Salt gives food flavor and brings out the best, while at the same time it serves as a preservative.

What allows a Christian to become salty? Fire. GOD knows that each believer needs a degree of testing by fire in order for Christ's fragrance to be manifested. We cannot become salty without this deeper work of the Holy Spirit's fire in our lives. Fire purifies all that is not of Christ. It takes away all the impurities that prevent His nature from being revealed in us.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:6-7. Are you a salty Christian? If not, pray a prayer that the immature are unwilling to pray. Pray that GOD makes you a salty Christian. It will result in praise and glory at the throne of GOD.

Generally, GOD answers every prayer although sometimes he says no. But occasionally there is an exception to that rule: When we harbor sin in our hearts, GOD withholds his answer until we first give up that "cherished" sin, see the teachings in Isaiah 59:1-2 and 1 Peter 3:7.

As you search for the truth about GOD, understand that it's best to deal with the subject of sin before you deal with the subject of prayer. When you ask GOD to forgive you for the things you've done, your sin will no longer be a barrier in your relationship with him. If you are already a believer, don't cherish things GOD despises.

A relationship with GOD is too valuable to short circuit on something that can only hurt you.

No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. Ephesians 5:29–30.

The union between Christ and his bride is so close ("one flesh") that any good done to her is a good done to himself. The clear assertion of this text is that this fact motivates the LORD to nourish, cherish, sanctify, and cleanse his bride.

What Christ does for his bride, this text plainly calls love: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church." Why not let the text define love for us, instead of bringing our definition from ethics or philosophy? According to this text, love is the pursuit of our joy in the holy joy of the beloved.

There is no way to exclude self-interest from love, for self-interest is not the same as selfishness. Selfishness seeks its own private happiness at the expense of others.

Love seeks its happiness in the happiness of the beloved. It will even suffer and die for the beloved in order that its joy might be full in the life and purity of the beloved.

This is how Christ loved us, and this is how he calls us to love one another.

We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. Psalm 33:20, so let us cast our cares upon Him for He cares for us.

Mark my words (and The Bible's) dear friends, there will come a day that our LORD will wipe away every tear from our eyes, the day that death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning,

nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things will have passed away. Will you be a part of that new and forever life? BE SURE. Ask and receive Jesus Christ as your LORD and personal SAVIOR today. Simply ask Him to forgive you of all your sins, and then REST in that wonderful and life changing decision. See Revelation 21:4. This is a promise, as GOD cannot lie.

Today I will place my hope in the LORD and trust Him to change the situations around me. **GOD desires that we pray you know. In other words, communicate with Him for our every need, day or night, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. He is ALWAYS there for us because He loves us. Don't overlook this precious and personal fact.**

What stories can you tell where you've seen GOD in the details? How did that help strengthen your faith? **Thank You, Father, that You show up in the little things as well as the big things.**

I desire to do your will, my GOD; your law is within my heart. Psalm 40: 8.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6.

It is easy to make assumptions about the path we are on. If GOD's Spirit has not enlightened our reasoning, we are inclined to make the wrong choices. Our choices seem right at the time, but later we discover these choices have led us away from GOD because they were based on our own reasoning.

Acknowledge GOD in all your ways today. Lean completely on Him to reveal His direction for your life. If you do so, He will direct you to the desired destination He has for you.

WHAT GIVES US TRUE HAPPINESS?

GOD may shower us with blessings and circumstances that bring joy to our lives, but true joy is found not in those things themselves but in their source. Joy can also be fueled and found

in living out GOD's Word and trusting in the promises GOD gives us in his Word. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. Psalm 119:14. Jesus confirmed two commands from the Old Testament; love GOD and love others as the greatest of all the commandments during an encounter recorded in the New Testament between Jesus and the religious leaders. Mark 12:28–34. GOD's promises find their ultimate fulfillment in his Son Jesus. So, when we abide in the vine of Christ through obedience to his commands, his nutrients of joy run through our spiritual veins from the inside out and produce the ripe, juicy fruit of joy in and through our lives. John 15:1-10.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. John 15:11.

Despite our circumstances, we can feel inner contentment and understand our purpose in life.

So, what differences does this make in the way we live?

The joy of Christ will replace or reduce stress. Joy becomes a filter through which we view life. We're not talking about rose colored glasses, but about actually having brand new eyes! Joy can change our perspective and our perception of negative circumstances. We aren't simply in denial, sticking our head in the sand, but rather we choose to rise above the circumstances and adopt an eternal mind-set. Stress can come from many different factors today. We can worry and fret because we feel we're not in control. Joy is an ongoing reminder that GOD is in control. That he is in charge of the outcome. Joy comes from trusting the controller of all things. The joy of Christ will become contagious through us. The joy of Christ will draw others to Christ.

All the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Matthew 24:29–31.

You should not gloat over your brother in the day of his misfortune. Obadiah 1:12.

As you have done, it will be done to you; Your deeds will return upon your own head. Obadiah 8:15.

When we see the challenges or suffering of others, even if it seems they've brought it upon themselves, we must choose compassion over pride. We're not in a position to judge others. Only GOD can do that. The kingdom of this world belongs to Him He alone holds the power of justice and mercy.

Let your kind deeds and giving be done quietly and humbly so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matthew 6:4.

All praise and adoration and honor and worship belong to the Creator. "Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" Hebrews 12:9. We should love Him, honor Him, and serve Him alone! We should worship Him and pay close attention to His words in order to obey them in every detail, esteeming Him and considering Him alone worthy of being worshiped! But Instead of obeying Him, serving, praising, and worshiping Him, most people do what is written in Romans 1:25. "Who exchanged the truth of GOD, the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever." Be very careful to worship the Creator and not the creation whether it be the stars, music, money, people and any other created things. Remember This! He is the one to be our object of worship, love and servitude. Enjoy and appreciate these created things but remember who created them.

There is no blemish in Jesus. The religious leaders and Roman authorities had to convict him on trumped-up charges because there was nothing to condemn him for. The GOD-Man lived the human life that no humans are able to live. Then he gave his life, a blemish free sacrifice to pay for all our sin.

It's a declaration of love so beautifully powerful that we can hang our eternities on it. In Jesus' perfect sacrifice, GOD is saying, "You can't live this life rightly, so I will live it rightly for you. And I love you so much that I will credit you with my righteousness, the righteousness you couldn't earn on your own."

The kingdom of darkness had one powerful hold on us, the curse of sin and death. When we accept the righteousness Jesus offers us, the curse of sin and death is broken in our lives. Darkness is defeated.

GOD equips each of us in such a way that is unique to our strengths and abilities. David was trained as a shepherd to use another weapon. For David, it was a slingshot. David showed great maturity in realizing he could not be effective with Saul's armor. We each have our own individual strengths and weaknesses. You are unlike anyone else. Be thankful for who you are.

What are the gifts and talents GOD has given to you? Have you ever tried to accomplish a task with tools you were not trained to use? GOD allows each of us to develop skills that are unique to our life. He will not call you to use someone else's tools.

However, this is only half of the equation. These talents must be mixed with faith. Talent alone is not enough. Faith alone is not enough. It is only when the two are combined that GOD's power is released and manifested in the physical realm. Mix your unique gifts with faith today; you will be surprised at the power of GOD that will be manifested.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of GOD and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Romans 8:17-18. WOW !!! Consider this wonderful, wonderful fact. Celebrate it !!! WE ARE HEIRS OF GOD ALMIGHTY.

Now walk the rest of your life in pure joy for what Jesus has allowed us to be a part of.

It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus.

Today I will rejoice in the glory of heaven that awaits and makes my suffering insignificant.

Help me LORD to remember during the challenges I face here, that eternity with You is infinitely better.

Anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Matthew 5:22.

The Holy Bible tells us that it is sinful when we let anger control us: "Don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil." Ephesians 4:26-27. Paul said to "get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." James cautioned us to be "slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that GOD desires."

When unchecked anger toward others threatens to consume us, we desperately need the Holy Spirit to fill and control our hearts so that our human tendencies can be replaced by the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:19–23. **Then, love, joy, and peace can mark our relationships.**

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Proverbs 9:10.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, GOD spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. Hebrews 1:1–2.

The Word that GOD spoke by his Son is the decisive Word. It will not be followed in this age by any greater word or replacement word. This is the Word of GOD, the person of Jesus, the teaching of Jesus, and the work of Jesus.

GOD is calling us to hear his final, decisive Word, to meditate on it and study it and memorize it and linger over it and soak in it until it saturates us to the center of our being.

The Holy Spirit always cooperates with Himself in His members. The Spirit directed body does not tear itself apart by competition. The ambitions of the various members are submerged in the glory of the Head, and whatever brings honor

to the Head meets with the most eager approval of the members.

We should cultivate the idea that we are co-workers rather than competitors. We should ask GOD to give us the psychology of cooperation. We should learn to think of ourselves as being members in particular of one and the same body, and we should reject with indignation every suggestion of the enemy designed to divide our efforts.

Let us be grateful that we may worship Him wherever we are and strive to make the praise of our Creator a part of our daily lives.

All Scripture is GOD-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of GOD may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Jesus' disciples argued among themselves about which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom. Then Jesus calls a little child to him and says that to be great is to welcome those who have no status at all.

When a woman walked into a Pharisee's house, it probably caused quite a scene. What is she doing here? Everyone knew who she was and what she had done. Her sin was most likely sexual in nature; she might have even been a prostitute. And when she started weeping at Jesus' feet, filling the room with the scent of the perfume she had brought. Touching him, the tension probably thickened.

The Pharisee seemed disgusted. But Jesus was honored.

At some point, the woman had heard Jesus' teaching and knew she could be forgiven. Out of gratitude, she offered the most lavish act of thankfulness she could think of. And when she was finally at the feet of the One who could forgive what she had done, she wept. Jesus' goodness brought her to tears.

Jesus was well aware of her sins, but it was her understanding of his good heart and her love for Him He focused on. She had seen Him for who He is and loved him back. And that is most beautiful to Him.

Several women were followers of Jesus and traveled with Him and the Twelve, supporting the group with their own money Luke 8:1-3. This was a drastic departure from the social standards of the day, in which women were seen as only being needed in the home. Jesus saw them as kingdom-advancers.

GOD speaks in many different ways to His children. He spoke through a bush to Moses. He spoke through a donkey to Balaam. He spoke through prophets to His kings. He speaks through other believers. He speaks directly to us through the invisible Holy Spirit. And He speaks even through circumstances.

When GOD wants to speak a very important word directly to us without interruption from the noise of our busy lives, he will take us "into the plain." The plain is a place of no distractions and no other persons. It is a place of silence. It can be a place of great need as it often fails to have the normal provisions we are accustomed to. It can be a place we go to voluntarily to seek His face, or we can be moved there without choice by His supernatural ability. More often, it is the latter method that brings us into the plain. In modern times, it often means a separation from our normal activities such as jobs or families.

The plain can also be a place where we discover afresh that GOD's hand has been on us all the time. When we are so busy with life, we sometimes forget that GOD's hand is still there, gently leading our path. When our lives get so busy that we are not listening or responding to His gentle touch, He must take more aggressive measures to get our attention. Thus, the plain is one of those appointed times of one-on-one communication with our heavenly Father. No distractions, no people, no beautiful surroundings to capture our thoughts. It is a barren place designed to allow us to seek and hear clearly. When He speaks, we need to be able to listen. We hear much better in the plain.

Do you need to hear GOD's voice today? Is your life so busy that you cannot even hear His voice? Each day GOD calls us to our own mini-plain in order to speak to us and for us to hear. If we neglect this time of communication with Him, we may be invited to His plain in order to hear without distraction. Pray that you might make time to hear.

I believe that GOD is still working in and on us.

You might not like the feeling of anyone running your life. But you really need the structure of rules, regulations and laws to function in society. And you truly need your wise and loving GOD as he works out His plan for your life. The LORD passionately cares about everything he wants to do in and through you. "The LORD will vindicate me," this is a song that promises Psalm 138:8. The New Testament says the same thing, that "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6. GOD sees all the moves he has mapped out for you. Psalm 139:16. He pays attention to the smallest details of your life. Luke 12:7. The LORD won't ever give up on you.

What do you think GOD wants to do in your life today?

Even when we were dead in our trespasses, GOD made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2:5.

The great missionary hope is that when the gospel is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, GOD himself does what man cannot do. He creates the faith that saves. The call of GOD does what the call of man can't. It raises the dead. It creates spiritual life. It is like the call of Jesus to Lazarus in the tomb, "Come forth!" John 11:43.

We can waken someone from sleep with our call, but GOD's call can summon into being things that are not. Romans 4:17. GOD's call is irresistible in the sense that it can overcome all resistance. It is infallibly effective according to GOD's purpose, so much so that Paul can say, "Those whom GOD called he also justified." Romans 8:30.

In other words, GOD's call is so effectual that it infallibly creates the faith through which a person is justified. All the called are justified. But none is justified without faith. Romans 5:1. So, the call of GOD cannot fail in its intended effect. It irresistibly secures the faith that justifies.

This is what man cannot do. It is impossible. Only GOD can take out the heart of stone. Ezekiel 36:26. Only GOD can draw people to the Son. John 6:44,65. Only GOD can open the heart so that it gives heed to the gospel. Acts 16:14. Only the Good Shepherd knows his sheep by name.

He calls them and they follow. John 10:3–4,14. The sovereign grace of GOD, doing the humanly impossible, is the great missionary hope.

Our constant effort should be to reach as many persons as possible with the Christian message, and for that reason numbers are critically important. But our first responsibility is not to make converts but to uphold the honor of GOD in a world given over to the glory of fallen man. No matter how many persons we touch with the gospel we have failed unless, along with the message of invitation, we have boldly declared the exceeding sinfulness of man and the transcendent holiness of the Most High GOD. They who degrade or compromise the truth in order to reach larger numbers, dishonor GOD and deeply injure the souls of men.

We cannot know that we have a long time to live; nor can we know how little a time we have to live, for it may prove less than we expect. Putting off repentance and faith can lead to eternal damnation.

Our ignorance of the day of Christ's return should provoke us to be careful as we eagerly await his coming. Matthew: 26.6. Knowing that Jesus could come at any minute should motivate us to pursue holiness, loving GOD and neighbor. We certainly do not want the LORD to catch us off-guard. Instead, we want to be found working diligently so that He will have no cause to be ashamed of His people.

My word will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11.

Remember what GOD has said through His prophet Isaiah.

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:9-11.

The Bible tells us that GOD's Word NEVER returns void. His Word is alive and sharper than any two edged sword. Never underestimate the power of His Word. Honor, worship and rely on THE WORD of GOD and His Holy Spirit.

It's likely that many of us have shared Jesus with a friend or family member, only to be met with indifference or outright rejection. But even when we don't see results right away, GOD's truth is powerful and will accomplish His purposes in His timing. Remember, His word never returns void.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You that Your Word will achieve Your purposes. I know that I can rely on your Holy Word always and forever.

"Be still and know that I am GOD." Psalm 46:10.

Psalm 121 is called a psalm of ascent. It's a song that pilgrims sang on the long walk up the mount to Jerusalem. It's fitting that it begins with mountain imagery. The terrain approaching Jerusalem is rocky, arid, and difficult and it makes for a sweaty climb. It is easy for your foot to slip, easy to be exposed mercilessly to the hot, Middle Eastern sun. But Jerusalem is where the temple stood. For GOD's people, it was the place where GOD's presence could be found. So, when the

psalmist looks to the mountains, he is looking toward GOD's presence. You, too, are on a pilgrimage. When life surprises you with pitfalls, or you stumble on the trail, or relentless trials beat down upon you like the hot sun, you can sing this psalm. You can ask GOD to invigorate your faith, as you remember where your help comes from. From the GOD of the universe who made everything you see, hear, touch, and experience. Look up! See the sky. Sing to the LORD as you ascend, and know that he will protect, guide, and strengthen you today.
LORD, please teach me to sing a song of ascent as I look to you today. Thank you for watching over me, sheltering me from harm. I am grateful for your kindhearted affection and protection. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Remember that our sufficiency is from GOD. 2 Corinthians 3:5. Apart from Him, we can do nothing.

In our time we have all kinds of status symbols in the Christian church. Membership, attendance, pastoral staff, missionary offerings. But there is only one status symbol that should make a Christian congregation genuinely glad. That is to know that our LORD is present, walking in our midst!

The secret of true spiritual worship is to discern and know the presence of the living Christ in our midst. This applies to our own individual heart and our church families heart as well.

A wise servant, however, does not delay his duties since he does not know when his master will return, and he refuses to be caught unawares. He does not put off loving service to his master because today might be his last chance to do what is right. Jesus could return at any moment or our life here on earth could end at any second. Faithfully serve Hime and try to always be ready.

Today I will not complain about what I lack but rather, think of what I can sacrifice for Jesus.

Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with purity. 1 Timothy 5:1–2.

How can seeing others as your brothers and sisters help you treat them with "absolute purity"? How do you think Paul's advice helps both sexes to flourish? Dear LORD, help me to treat others with respect and purity. 1 Timothy 5:2.

For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the LORD endures forever." 1 Peter 1:24.

Jesus said He would never leave or forsake His children. However, we can walk away from His fellowship by refusing to be with Him. Do not let this happen to you. He longs to have daily fellowship with you because He loves you.

If your greatest joy is to experience the infilling grace of GOD overflowing from you for the good of others, then the best news in all the world is that GOD will do the impossible through you for the salvation of the other people.

Dear GOD, we are so inundated with distracting things and clamorous voices. Deliver me today from the trifling things and help me to spend every minute of the day on the things that matter. Amen.

Our Creator has blessed everyone in Christ with spiritual blessings above and beyond our undeserved salvation. Even those who have comparatively fewer gifts are rich in Him and must put their time and talents to work. GOD sovereignly determines our gifts and graces, and, whether we have many or few, He mandates their profitable use. Even those with only one gift have no excuse if they do not use it to bear fruit for the

kingdom. It is not how many gifts we have; it is how we use the ones we have.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of GOD that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. Romans 1:16.

Today and everyday hereafter, put GOD first in every situation that you face. You will be pleasantly surprised at the results of your efforts and above all else Father GOD will be pleased with you. You can count on that!

Doing Good for the Sake of the Gospel.

You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of GOD.
Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about GOD our SAVIOR attractive. Titus 2:1–10.

Loving GOD, help me to be a good representative of the gospel. Help me to draw others to You.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of GOD's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to GOD. This is your true and proper worship. Romans 12:1.

Some Pharisees asked Jesus when his kingdom would come. He says it won't be observable because it's in their midst, it's already here for them to take part in. HIS kingdom is "already here". It is all around us but since it is a genuine spiritual concept most people don't understand. Our work while we are left here on earth is to promote the reality of Jesus and share that concept with others. This is our assignment.

The kingdom of GOD is in your midst," Jesus tells the Pharisees. Luke 17:21. Rather than a hidden secret that needs to be unveiled, GOD's kingdom is there with the Pharisees, ready for them to enter as active participants.

GOD's heart-desire is for his people to live in his kingdom where He reigns, and where love, joy, justice, peace and goodness are the laws of the land. Jesus wants to clarify that his kingdom isn't just coming at some point in the future, like the Pharisees were thinking. It is already here, in the present, in their everyday lives. GOD's kingdom is where justice is done, where love is lived out, where this world that we live in here and now is a glimpse of heaven. GOD wants the Pharisees and everyone to join in his kingdom and become actively involved in spreading it. And then, one day, he will usher in the kingdom completely.

If we are obedient, GOD will allow us to see what others cannot see. It is the rite of passage for those who are willing to risk all for GOD's purposes. GOD increases the spiritual senses to levels we never knew before. Those around us will observe this.

Do you want to see what others cannot see? If so, it will require a level of obedience that will go beyond human reason. It may require risk and ridicule from others. But you will see what others cannot see.

When Jesus started His earthly ministry, the focus of His message was about the kingdom of GOD or the kingdom of heaven. The Gospel of Mark informs us that Jesus was proclaiming, "'The time has come,' he said. "The kingdom of

GOD has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1:15.

It should not surprise us that most of Jesus' parables were about the kingdom of GOD. In one sense, Jesus' message was nothing new. The Jewish people were anticipating a time when GOD would establish His kingdom though the Messiah. And yet, Jesus' message was shocking because He was not merely claiming that there was a kingdom (or that there will be a kingdom) but that the kingdom of GOD had arrived.

The theme of "the kingdom" as a present reality is found in several parables. For example, in the parable of the great banquet in Luke 14, the guests who were invited began to make excuses for not attending the banquet (which in this parable represents the kingdom). Why did they make excuses? Because they didn't recognize the importance of entering the kingdom. Other things seemed more important. So, while many would not boldly refuse such a banquet (or enter the kingdom), that is in essence what they were doing since Jesus had already given the invitation when He proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Matthew 3:2. This was Jesus' way of saying, "Come, for everything is now ready." Since the kingdom has come, no excuses are valid. The kingdom, though it has not yet fully arrived, already began in the ministry of Jesus

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the LORD, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the LORD. 1 Corinthians 15:58.

It is good to come to the understanding that while GOD wants us to be holy and Spirit-filled, He does not expect us to look like Abraham or to play the harp like David or to have the same spiritual insight given to Paul.

All of those former heroes of the faith are dead. You are alive in your generation. A Bible proverb says that it is better to be a living dog than a dead lion. You may wish to be Abraham or Isaac or Jacob but remember that they have been asleep for long centuries, and you are still around! You can witness for

your LORD today. You can still pray. You can still give of your substance to help those in need. You can still encourage the depressed.

I hope you have not missed something good from GOD's hand because you felt you did not measure up to Gideon or Isaiah. In this your generation, give GOD all of your attention! Give Him all of your love! Give Him all of your devotion and faithful service! You do not know what holy, happy secret GOD may want to whisper to your responsive heart.

Heavenly Father, I commit myself to faithfulness today. I may not have the great gifts of some of the "former heroes of the faith" but You've given me life today; You've given me the gifts You want me to have and use; You've called me by Your grace to serve You. I give it all to You today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, He will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Matthew 25:31-46.

According to Matthew's gospel, only two kinds of people walk this earth: those who love Jesus and those who do not. There is no middle ground. Either we are for the SAVIOR or against Him.

On one hand, Herod's evil plans showed him to be one of the LORD's enemies, and on the other, Matthew's leaving all to follow Christ indicated what side he was on. Then there was the rich young ruler, whose seeming love of money placed him on the wrong side .

Those who refuse to invest their goods and talents for the sake of the kingdom have no love for Jesus, but the people who put their gifts to work for GOD will be seen for the kingdom servants they are.

The picture of final judgment is further evidence that all people will be grouped into two categories at the end of this age. Most

Christians have heard the account of the sheep and the goats used as an exhortation for the church to meet the needs of all the destitute. Certainly, we must care even for the needy who are not part of the covenant community. After all, the Mosaic law encourages generosity toward strangers Leviticus 23:22, a principle not limited to the old covenant era. Luke 14:12–14. Not inappropriately, believers have served all mankind based on Matthew 25:31–46. However, Jesus is not dealing first and foremost with poor people in general. Instead, He is referring primarily to our care for other Christians. Since Christ identifies His disciples as His brothers elsewhere in Matthew 12:46–50 the story of the sheep and the goats concerns our treatment of other believers.

This does not mean that doing good to believers merits salvation. Jesus is merely teaching that if anyone says, I love GOD, and hates his brother, he is a liar. 1 John 4:20. True love for the SAVIOR begets love for all those united to Him by faith.

Even if only in simple deeds, the sheep are to serve one another, especially the needy. Goats, though they dwell among GOD's flock today, disregard the sheep and overlook their needs. Thus, they manifest hatred for the One to whom the sheep are united and deserve only a dreadful fate. Matthew 25:41–46.

We actually serve the LORD when we do simple acts of service for one another. It does not take much effort to make a meal for new parents or a family who has recently lost a loved one. A call or visit to the lonely or shut-in takes mere moments but can reap lasting rewards. The donation of time, money, or supplies to your church's mercy ministry is an act of love for Jesus. Our profession of faith is invalid if we are not engaged in these or other similar activities.

Today I choose to walk "the way of the cross" as I make my daily decisions and choices. LORD, help me never to choose the easy ways of the worlds culture but to walk "the way of the cross!"

Jesus, Your power is made visible in my weakness. I confess my failings so I can boast in You!

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of GOD. Not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9.

It is important for us to know whether we have GOD's hand upon our endeavors. Presumption leads to failure. GOD's favor leads to success. Ask GOD to confirm His hand on your endeavors.

"If Your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here." Exodus 33:15.

You are in your car driving home. Thoughts wander to the game you want to see or meal you want to eat, when suddenly a sound unlike any you've ever heard fills the air. The sound is high above you. A trumpet? A choir? A choir of trumpets? You don't know, but you want to know. So, you pull over, get out of your car, and look up. As you do, you see you aren't the only curious one. The roadside has become a parking lot. Car doors are open, and people are staring at the sky. Shoppers race out of the grocery store. The Little League baseball game across the street has come to a halt. Players and parents are searching the clouds. And what they see, and what you see, has never before been seen. As if the sky were a curtain, the drapes of the atmosphere part. A brilliant light spills onto the earth. There are no shadows. None. From whence comes the light also begins to tumble a river of color, spiking crystals of every hue ever seen and a million more never seen. Riding on the flow is an endless fleet of angels. They pass through the curtains one myriad at a time, until they occupy every square inch of the sky. North. South. East. West. Thousands of silvery wings rise and fall in unison, and over the sound of the trumpets, you can hear the cherubim and seraphim chanting, "Holy, holy, holy." The final flank of angels is followed by 24 silver- bearded elders and a multitude of souls who join the angels in worship. Presently the movement stops, and the trumpets are silent, leaving only the triumphant triplet: "Holy, holy, holy." Between each word is a pause. With each word, a profound reverence. You hear your voice join in the chorus. You don't know why you say the words, but you know you must. Suddenly, the heavens are quiet. All is

quiet. The angels turn, you turn, the entire world turns and there he is. Jesus. Through waves of light, you see the silhouetted figure of Christ the King. He is atop a great stallion, and the stallion is atop a billowing cloud. He opens his mouth, and you are surrounded by his declaration: "I am the Alpha and the Omega" Rev 22:13. The angels bow their heads. The elders remove their crowns. And before you is a figure so consuming that you know instantly that nothing else matters. Forget stock markets and school reports. Sales meetings and football games. Nothing is newsworthy. All that mattered, matters no more, for Christ has come. This word is taken from the Max Lucado Encouraging Word Bible.

I humbly believe with all my heart that we are born to worship, praise, honor and thoroughly enjoy GOD for an eternity. As we travel this earthly life from birth to death, we are continually learning as we attend "The School Of Life. May you make your best possible decisions along the way. The most important decision that will have eternal consequences is whether we choose to serve A HOLY GOD or not. He loves you truly and always will. Please be sure of your salvation because "eternity is a long, long, long, long time". You were given a free will by GOD. So, the choice is yours. Please choose wisely.

ALL PRAISE, ALL HONOR, ALL GLORY AND ALL LOVE TO THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY. HE IS WORTHY OF OUR PRAISE. HE IS LORD OF LORDS AND KING OF KINGS !!!

"Sovereign GOD, I'm Your servant. I'll share the message, I'll pray for response, but only You can draw an unsaved person to faith in Christ. Thank You for the privilege of having even a small part in Your sovereign work. In Jesus' Holy Name, Amen."

References and Resources:

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